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TILLERS OF THE SOIL

J·E·PATTERSON

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TILLERS OF THE SOIL

TILLERS OF THE SOIL

BY

J. E. PATTERSON

AUTHOR OF "FISHERS OF THE SEA," "WATCHERS BY THE SHORE," ETC.

"Truths demand not the artistry of a painted lie:"
—LUDWIG VON EYB.

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THE TROW PRESS, NEW YORK

TO

MY OLD FRIENDS AND SINCERE

WELL-WISHERS

G. H. P. AND A. P.

TRANSFER FROM C. B. AUG 1923

For permission to republish "Brown Youth and White Maiden," and "The Song of the Spade," the author is indebted to the kindness of the editors of *The Westminster Gazette* and *The World's Work*, respectively.

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PREFACE

It is no pleasant feeling to be compelled to speak when there is a reluctance to do so. Yet my position happens to be between the two horns of this dilemma. But, first, it is my duty and my pleasure to thank those critics—a hundred and thirty out of a possible hundred and forty—who so kindly received "Fishers of the Sea" and "Watchers by the Shore" as to enable me to proceed with a large design to exhibit certain phases of British industrial life and character by the means of fiction.

The reluctance is this: Fearful of appearing to complain where no complaint is meant, and apprehensive of breaking the now apparently accepted rule that a novel has no right to the vestibule of a preface, I am afraid of being misunderstood. The compulsion lies in the fact that a number of the reviewers were so sympathetically interested in my career as a novelist that they dwelt on the "bad form" of those two stories, particularly of the first one; some "sighed for the form of the French novel." All this was most kindly meant, and received accordingly. But is not truth of far greater importance to life than mere art can ever be? Whether or not it be brought against me as a part of the indictment, that "bad construction" was of deliberate intention. This and the reason of it were seen by some of the critics, while practically all of them admitted that the method was justified by its success. It is not for me to claim that this was English (though strength and ruggedness

have ever been held to be a combined British characteristic in almost everything that was, or still is, peculiarly ours); in that sense it was not; it was personal, and I would not shuffle on to the broader shoulders of our national composition a fault that was, is, and will be, intentionally mine. But I would ask humbly, of those who are wiser than I: Is it not better to have a native product that is redolent of its own soil and fully attains its fair ends, than to have the sort of bi-sexed thing that says "Yes" and "No" in the same breath, in a way speaks two languages at once and nothing definite in either, and can claim no national where to lay its head? Is it not more fitting to have such pieces of life as "The Dop Doctor" and "A Titan" and pardon their ruggedness, than to find the press teeming with smooth effeminacy that teaches nothing, represents nothing? Whilst seeking to avoid the obviously commonplace and the untrue, and being by Nature excluded from the front rank of his calling, may not a depictor of life be allowed to be himself, to do his work in his own way?—particularly when to be so is to be British, upright and innocuous. Akin to this subject, even a part of it, therefore allied to this defence of method yet personally apart from it: Was it not more to the good of our literary history to have the rugged lines of George Chapman than to be heirs to all the Italianate efforts of the mincers of his day and thereafter? Whilst they were playing fast-and-loose with their birthright—now seriously dallying with a southern light-of-heart who, taken from her sunny surroundings, was as a Dresden figure in the glow of a smithy; then, with less seriousness and more hurry, giving a light impenitent's heed to the deeper charms of a compatriot—

whilst they, with a few honourable exceptions, were thus wasting their heritage and their natural resources, was not Chapman drawing strength from the native wells of less shallow fancy and expression? By this he gave us a cord of English make with which to bind ourselves truer to ourselves. And, whilst admitting the qualities and the graces in form, smell and use, of what our neighbour grows on soil that is unlike our own; is it not more honest, in the main even wiser, to continue to foster our national growths on their own sturdy stock, rather than to graft on them such forms of delicacy as can never be other than foreign to them? Is not originality, that makes its point and is harmless to the ethics of life, of more value to literature, to human thought and progress, than imitations which grow more and more unlike their fanciful original? Is it not what a really new and practical invention is to applied science?

But I wander, as most of us do when we find ourselves in a changeless avenue that was loved of old and is still revered. Far be it from me to cavil at what friendly pens have set down, seemingly against me. It is with the subject that I deal, all inadequately, and perhaps too briefly. Its personal aspect is no more to me than what this "Defence" reveals without complaint. The same charge will probably be brought against this book. To that, as to the others, I answer "Guilty," and abide the sentence. It will also be observed that the same mood is not maintained throughout this story; if it were, then I should have failed in my intention. Varying acts done by various persons at different times in their lives cannot possibly have a continuity of mood; otherwise we should have jokes truly executed in tragedy, and dire

calamities would take place to the accompaniment of laughs. This striving after art—possibly a foolish notion to the minds of others—may be put down in evidence against me. Well, so be it. I have my "balk" to plough—am out on the road and must reach my billet ere the night comes down. Yet having thus far adventured into the realm of personal print, bristling with its surprises of ambush and battle, I ask leave to add to this "Defence": I rebel against no canons of the art whereby I live; but in the use of my materials I claim to be allowed the liberty of a free-trade workman who, after all, is his own employer. My purpose is to glean in the field of actual and contemporary life, picking up an ear here, another there, and binding my poor sheaves as the ears come to my hands. For I am neither Sower nor Reaper, only a gleaner. And if the ears do not all measure to the same eighth of an inch, nor all my sheaves weigh to the same scruple, what matters it? Be assured that the gathering and binding of each sheaf will be done with all the gleaner's care. And why blame him for not having that greater care which Nature would not give? Remember the genial Autocrat's "Our ripest fruit we never reach, the flowering moments of the mind lose half their petals in our speech." Alas, that it should be so? Achievement's hill we try to top, gain a ledge some distance up, and find the summit lies beyond our strength. Still there is endeavour left to keep us from despairing—we *may* reach a resting-place somewhere near the top. And if we move this way and that on the journey, one trial good, another comparatively bad—what then? Is that not life?—these sheaves we separately bring to the general stack of human effort? Life is not uniform, ex-

cept on a few broad, open lines; its subtleties are all diverse, sometimes far to seek, and always difficult to present adequately. Why, then, should one be asked to trim and shape and touch-up this greatest of all things known to the human mind? Would it not be as fair to request one to mend life itself? As to the inequalities of human nature, the contradictions in vice and virtue which a novelist (but for its clumsiness I would rather say the chronicler of bye-ways in actual life, for that would be nearer the truth) may find by chance, or hunt out for his purpose: It is not my plan to portray Bayards and Dorigens, nor to make any pattern humans as models for any man or woman to shape his or her life by; but to write of life as I find it, drawing what inferences I may, or leaving the moral to my readers, according to the mood and the occasion. Your immaculates are the subject proper of artistic, poetic romance, not of contemporary life. To my humble thinking there are more, and more beautiful and noble, lessons in everyday existence as we know it, than can be gleaned from all the romances of all times. What is greater still, these lessons are in that code of Nature whereof we are a part. Thus do I, apprehensively and of no account, present this my "Defence" to the court that has for the moment made me something by putting me on trial, charged with doing that of which I, once more, answer "Guilty."

J. E. P.

BILLERICAY, October, 1910.

BOOK I

THISTLES IN THE WHEAT

SEEDLINGS

"CORN, golden corn—golden corn and golden sunlight; they seem to run together like a beautiful poem," she murmured, waving her hands to and fro, outstretched to their full extent, amongst the ripe wheat; she the while walking quietly up the gently sloping, curving path to a stile, over which towered a couple of Essex elms, looking like gargantuan brussels sprouts. "Oh, it's good to be alive! It *is* good to be alive—when you're happy." That happiness was purely her joy in life, her splendid health and a mind which was generally so contented that she rarely stopped to notice the shortcomings of her position.

A creature of moods, one who had largely modelled herself on the father whom she so much admired at most times, she had unwittingly spoken those latter words in a tone that would have reached the ears of a person at the stile. This thought flashed across her mind, to be at once flung away with a toss of her head that nearly threw the big, old Leghorn hat and its red, live poppies from her rebellious mass of tawny-brown hair. At the moment what did she care, and why should she care, if anyone had been there to hear her? She was on her father's land, his last uncut field of grain. She was her father's daughter. And in this "mean county" there was no one to trouble about—only the farm-hands, and here and there a farmer whose thoughts were hardly ever off roots or grass, grain or weather, pigs or cattle. To her there seemed to be no "gentleman farmers" in this part of the world, like the Ramsbottoms and themselves and some others whom she called to mind in the old county—

especially such as Ben Ramsbottom and Alick Sutcliffe, Ben in particular. But there were times when she admitted this to be a probably unfair opinion. At another time she would have been afraid to flash a defiant look around her, lest some chance observer should consider her to be too forward. Now those magnificent eyes of hers, which could say so many things in so many ways, according to the mood and the occasion, threw ahead then behind a glance that said she did not care a brass farthing for all the world.

With her hands still waving in the corn and her pace meditative, she rounded the slight bend in the path, on higher ground, and came in full view of the stile and the slanting meadow-path beyond. Instantly a change came over her. Uncertainty further checked her footsteps. A flush deepened that glorious complexion of hers, making the rather irregular face lose some of its beauty of light and shade. Then she regathered her somewhat startled wits, and stepped forward to the stile; just as a young man vaulted lightly over the barrier, he having hurried forward for that purpose, so that she should not be embarrassed by having to climb the stile before him.

"Good-afternoon," said he, in a slight nasal accent, lifting his hat as he went by.

She bowed, murmured some half-inaudible salutation, and made at the stile an ordered assault that put her on the other side in a moment. Indeed, so quickly came the thud of her feet on the sun-baked path, that he swung about on his heel to see if she was really over the wooden bars. She saw his action, intuitively divined the reason of it, felt a mingled sensation of resentment and pleasure at what he had done and at the actuating thought behind it; then she flung at him a sort of optical challenge which half-bade him to mind his own business. To cover this error, by pretending that he had turned for another reason, he approached the stile, saying,

"I—I hope you'll just pardon me, some; but I'm glad I met you. I wanted to ask if you'll let me have some eggs, if I come to the farm this evening?"

"But how do you know that I have eggs to sell?" she asked, feeling a return of the mood that had grown upon her during her walk through the big cornfield, on her way home.

"Well, I guess that you are Miss Aureola Shuttleworth," he answered, smilingly, and meaning "know" instead of "guess."

"But guesses are not facts."

"That's so, every time. But you're a fact, and a . . ."

"Yes . . . A what?"

"Excuse me, please. I've got just a big ambition to be a gentleman in England, and it doesn't appear to be gentlemanly to pay compliments—anyhow, not unless they're in a sort of evening clothes."

"What do you mean?" inquired she, showing some new interest, almost unknown to herself, and taking a step nearer to the stile.

He suddenly became a trifle sheepish. One of those subtle changes of atmosphere, that come by the way of a mere remark at such times, was giving her the better of the battle; a battle which she had previously thought would come about, if ever they should chance to enter into conversation on a light subject. It occurred to him that, if he wished to maintain his ground and uphold the reputation of his country, he must brace himself up to the task before him; or this curiously handsome English girl would leave him "just about knocked into a cocked hat."

He began, "You are——" when she interrupted him with—

"I thought you had gone away again?"

"So I had; but I guess that didn't stop me from coming right back."

"Not unless you had neither legs nor money."

"And it just happens that I have a little of both."

"So it seems. But you *were* going to America again. Were you not?"

"Yes and no . . ." He was looking up at her, because the meadow lay a good foot above the cornfield. She looked down at him, as at one whom she had known a long time. His mind was stumbling, in a way, around the queries: Why had he not previously come upon her in such a mood as her present one was? And why was it that he had never before managed to go further than a simple "Good-morning," "Good-evening" or "How d' you do?" She was thinking what a fine-looking fellow he was, how a frank and honest mind seemed to "speak up" from his whole face and athletic figure; and that in spite of his American twang he was certainly the most attractive piece of manhood in the district. At the moment it did not occur to her that one mostly sees the best of a face when looking slightly down at it. Besides, his being such an unusual sort of stranger, combined with his two recent visits to that out-lying piece of generally dull and stodgy Essex, had already made him an object of some curiosity both to her and to some other persons in the neighbourhood. Minutes slipped by; and, unnoticed by them, the air was fast becoming oppressive.

Now he realised that the simple, steady gaze—not a stare—of her brown eyes was getting the better of his blue ones. To break this incipient sort of personal magnetism, he gave himself a mental shake-up, blinked his eyelids vigorously, and said in reply to her query, but solely to re-start conversation, "Ah, it's a great country, Miss Shuttleworth."

"Yes," answered she, quite quietly, and still smiling, "from one side to the other."

During a brief instant or two he stared at her, in some doubt as to whether or not this was merely a bit of

repartee, or if it held some more biting meaning. Then, laughing lightly, he rejoined. "You're smart, I guess, as the lock said to the thief when he picked it."

"And you'll smart, as the onions said to the kitchen-maid's eyes, if father catches you trampling his corn like that," was the answer she made, in exactly the same manner and tone as before, as she pointed to what he was doing.

In order to avoid looking towards the setting, though still brightly yellow, sun—her head being, from his first position, in a direct line with it—he had stepped a foot or so backwards, into the wheat. Now, clearing himself of the trampled grain, he laughed outright, a clear wholesome note that seemed to challenge criticism; and, although it was not loud, it somehow reminded her of her father's great laughs.

"Snakes," said he, merrily, "but you're there every time,—precisely there, you are."

Feeling that, unless she kept a tight rein on the thing, her audacity would get the better of her driving, Ola (as her father always addressed her, with the pronunciation of a Scandinavian "ö" rather than an English "o") replied, "It's very kind of you to say so. But England should always be there when America is. —Shouldn't she? It's hardly right for the young one to think it can always do better than its parent. If the sun dazzles your eyes, why don't you stand over there?" She pointed to the doubly opposite side of the stile to that on which she was standing.

"Say, I guess you can talk some, Miss Shuttleworth," said he, moving to the spot indicated to him.

"Guess again, and you may guess wrong."

"Sharp."

"Well, Nature gave me a tongue."

"And some wits, just."

"That is not——" she lifted her head, listeningly,

along the way she had come, from the village. He seized the opportunity to gaze more ardently at that glow of life and health, which was so simply yet so effectively framed-in by the broad, low-hanging brim of the big hat, and equally backed by the thick green of the hedge behind her. She added, in a lower and much more matter-of-fact tone, the while she watched the bend in the corn-field path, "for me to say."

"Maybe not; but——" His remark was abruptly broken off by the sound of footsteps somewhere amongst the wheat. He saw what had brought about the change in her: She had been quicker than he was to detect the approach of a possible gossip. Impulsively he was about to move away. Then a flash of thought told him that he had better hold himself in readiness for prompt action, and leave the management of the matter to her. At that moment her face brightened, unconsciously telling him that there was no longer any need for apprehension. He glanced away to his right and saw, just on their side of that bend in the path, an elderly little man whom he had occasionally seen in the village and about the fields.

As the newcomer drew nearer, with a curiously light-hearted shuffling movement, while a sibilant sort of tuneful monotone, not much above a whisper, was issuing from between his puckered lips, she said brightly, "Well, Jinglejoy, how are you to-day?"

"Oh, A'm in th' seventh heaven ta-day, Miss— slap up in th' seventh heaven, A am," was the cheery answer, as he made at the stile, showing a billhook, a pair of shears and worn leather gloves hanging by a cord over his shoulder.

"Why, how's that?"

"T' maister hes gien me a shillin' rise in me wages," and, putting one leg over the top wooden bar, he broke again into that half-whistle; then, in a naturally sweet tenor voice, came,

"Wi' a 'Aye, gee-wo,' an' on we go,
Ovver the fresh brown earth, yo' kno'."

"I'm glad of that; it's because the weather is so hot for your work," said 'Ola.

"Ay, Miss, it's hot,—hot as luv' an' nigh as uncum-f'rtable; but 'tisn't for that. Yo' ax 'im"; and, to clear his billhook of the stile, he turned half-around, giving the stranger a look with his left eye; while the right one, in which there was a cast, seemed to be trying to get a sight of her face.

"I suppose you will say it's because you do your work so well?"

"Noa, Miss, it's 'cause he luv's me. Ah, luv' 's a wunderful thing,—a wunderful thing, luv' is," with that he shuffled off along the meadow; again emitting that sunny whisper of a whistle, which he interrupted to look back and say, "Mind, there's agoin' to be a storm."

'Ola watched him, as he went, with an amused joyous expression on her face; neither she nor Lucian heeding his warning a scrap, or even being aware of that change in the atmosphere. A minute passed; then she became aware that the young man was softly humming,

"With oaten pipe I'll play to thee,
Oh, maiden of the rich brown earth,
Till Life bursts through the gates of Death,
To know a greater birth."

Turning her laughing face upon him, she remarked, "Why, I declare you're as bad as Jinglejoy—only he's a bit lower in the scale, probably."

"And who's Jinglejoy?—It's a fine name for the battle of life, anyhow."

"He is father's hedger-and-ditcher; he's always singing, and that's his nickname. Will that do for you?"

"I just guess it will, a while. But why shouldn't I sing to you some?"

"Don't be childish!—serenading amongst the corn, in daylight, too!"

"Isn't it natural to sing when you're just that happy you don't know what else to do right away?"

"You're silly,—I believe—just now."

"No.—Stay, you give me an idea. Why am I like a serpent?"

"Because you're . . . artful?"

"I knew, right enough, that it left me open to flank attacks. But, anyhow, I ask it seriously: Why am I like a serpent?" And the smile on his face showed how little he feared any obvious comparison.

"Don't know. You are too subtle in your riddles."

"Because I'm wise——"

"Oh, are you really!" she laughingly interrupted.

"But why am I wise?" he asked, heedless of her banter.

"Is that another?"

"Yes."

"Then I give it up, too, because it's more a poser than the other."

"Because I'm in love."

Instantly the amusement and the sunny expression passed from her face. The merry light died out of her eyes; and in their places came a sufficiency of warning severity, of startled questioning and some dislike. But immediately something at the back of 'Ola's mind drew her closer attention to that frank, unoffending boyishness which had stamped all he had said and was characteristic of his manner generally. Evidently his remark was made in simple sincerity, as he would have done to one whom he had known for years; but apparently, so ran 'Ola's thoughts, she would have to proceed a little more circumspectly—she would have to ride with an eye open for a chance ditch masked by an innocent-looking fence.

Just as his slower mind was beginning to take in that change in her bearing, she diplomatically brought back a portion of the smiling manner, and said, "But men don't know what love is."

"I guess we do, just."

"I wish you wouldn't guess so much," she put in suddenly, in a slightly irritable tone that made him open his eyes a shade wider. "We don't like guesses in this country; we like facts."

"I'm very sorry," he ventured, in abruptly acquired humility and some wonderment.

"Well, don't be,—there's nothing to be sorry about yet." Although this was said in a more cheery and conciliatory voice and manner than her previous remark had been, 'Ola felt that an undesirable atmosphere was creeping into this chance interview with one who was at least interesting, and who appeared to be rather more harmless than his genus usually were. Hence she added at once, and now quite brightly, "But such love as men feel often makes a man downright wicked."

"Not my brand," and he shook his head, quietly yet determinedly; then he added, as if correcting himself, "I mean not the kind that we Amuricans consider to be the best on the market."

"And do the prices fluctuate much with you Amuricans on *that* market?" she asked mischievously. In the pause she made, he put another questioning look straight at her face. "Because if so, I'm afraid that one of your financiers will be making a 'corner' in it."

"You're just a mighty tease, I guess."

"But look at the difference now: If a woman loves, she simply can't be wicked—I mean, not towards the object; she just has to sacrifice herself to it." 'Ola slightly reddened under his scrutiny, to break which she added quickly and confusedly, "At least, that is my impression."

"But is it fair to judge by impressions?"

"Well, what are you to do when you haven't any experiences?" Her conscience pricked her slightly at a passing recollection of Ben Ramsbottom, although that was rather a youthful sensation than an experience.

For reply he laughed, and she laughed with him.

"But, to come back," she resumed, "then a lover is like a serpent?"

"Yes——"

"And that's too often true, alas!"

"Because he is wise in being a lover."

"A serpent-lover?"

"You forget some—you have had no experiences." Again there was the combined laugh.

He secured an ear of corn and began to break it up in the palm of his left hand, she watching him amusedly; and neither of them saw that a large black cloud was coming down on them from the right, over the high hedge behind 'Ola. "You say that old curio' there——"

"You mustn't call our Jinglejoy a curio'! He's too precious for that!"

"Well, the hedger-and-ditcher, then. You say he sings some——"

"Yes. Give that to me! You try my patience with your town-way of fumbling about it." She held out her hand for the bruised ear of wheat. He gave it to her. "Now then, go on again; but don't make a long story of it; my time is getting short," and she proceeded to rub the corn out of its ear.

"Well, once more; Mr. Jinglejoy——"

"Don't '*Mr.*' him! He's *Jinglejoy*."

"Yes," was the humble answer, "Jinglejoy, the joy that jingles all the day and all the way, and——"

"I must go," and she moved as if to do so.

"No, don't, please—let me finish my tale."

"I give you just five minutes."

"I'll be done in four and forty-five seconds, if you'll sit right there," he indicated the further end of the top bar of the stile, the lowness of which on the meadow-side enabled her to sit on it in a way. Without looking at him, and rubbing the corn the while, she did as he asked. "Now," he continued, "Jinglejoy will be at the harvest-home—oh, yes, I've heard of it some," he interrupted, in reply to an inquiring glance from her; "and he'll sing, of course, and bring the house down, 'cause he's a native. Well, I sing some, too; and I'm going to be at that harvest-home, precisely; and maybe I'll sing. So, just to see what chance I stand of having turnips thrown at me, I'm going to warble you a little ditty right here—that is, unless you say no. Oh, don't be afraid, I shall not bring all the natives around by trying to out-sing the birds."

"No, because none of them sing at this time of the year and day," said she, in merry irony.

"There you are, you see; there's my town-ignorance again, right to the front. But anyhow, can I sing?"

"I cannot tell; I haven't heard you try."

"May I try?"

It was pleasant, very pleasant there, between the gold and the green, when the broiling afternoon was turning to the cool of evening; and the audacity of the situation was lending it a secondary interest. They did not notice the quick coming of the breeze that made the poplar leaves rustle like the sudden falling of gentle rain on foliage. What were a black cloud and that "chokiness" in the air to them, who were so occupied with each other? 'Ola's former mood had quite returned to her. She knew that she could loiter another half-hour. So out of the brimming state of her carelessness, and slightly imitating his intonation, which he took as flattery, she replied,

"Yes, go right ahead; but mind you just chop it off short."

Without any further pause, in a rich and well-modulated baritone voice, which he kept carefully within the bounds of the moment, he sang, while she rubbed at the corn, now and then blowing away the chaff:

"Ah, veil those eyes where beauty glows,
  Or here confess e'en you could sin;
For by their burning light that glows,
  I swear they are of Eve's own kin.
Not that you tempt, though much you could;
  And by withholding more's your power;
But that there's yielding in this blood,
  Whene'er I cross its lady's bower:
Your worshipper am I; yet, Charmer, pray,
Say not devotion's self in one short day.

"Give heed, give heed!—put by that smile;
  I am but human, you divine;
Dole out your witchery yet a while—
  I cannot bear such goddess wine.
Ah, pray be kind in seeming less!
  Wreathe not those lips so richly formed;
Bless me with lesser blessedness,—
  Their shape alone hath me be-stormed:
Keep, keep such spells for hearts of flinty make;
My heart you have—do not my senses take!"

During a few moments after he stopped singing there was nothing to break the silence, except the drowsy hum of the hedgerow and the chirps of two or three birds. She was saying to herself, "How curiously like Ben he is in some things,—same eyes, I believe, and same mouth, very nearly, but stronger, perhaps; and he's taller and sings better." From under his eyebrows he was looking up at her down-bent face, as she blew the chaff from the corn; and in his gaze there was a question which he would not have asked for all the acres that lay in sight. Then, without looking up, she inquired, quite quietly,

"Where did you learn that song?"

"In Amurica."

"Do they write many songs like it in Amurica?—Here's your corn."

"Yes, I believe so," said he, taking the wheat, and feeling relieved at her mocking his pronunciation, which was done in the same soft, rather musical, long-drawn vowel intonation that he used; an intonation that 'Ola curiously liked, then thought she did not.

"Well," she observed, in voice and manner touching the high-water mark of gentle and slightly interested practicality, "with a voice like that and the feeling you put into it and a good stock of such songs you ought to be able to make a decent living, instead of idling your life away; and perhaps you would make a little fame as well."

"Fame is the breath that comes after us; notoriety is of our own time," he replied, in more apparent seriousness than he had had shown up to this point.

"You talk like a book, sometimes, except for that. . . ."

"Yes, that what?"

"Well, you do sometimes—don't you?" 'Ola said, in the manner of one making a tentative sort of charge. She had again become too serious to tell him that the exception, at which she had abruptly stumbled, was the nasal sound in his voice.

For reply he answered, "Yes, I guess I do sometimes; but those same 'sometimes' come to most of us now and then—when we can make 'em."

"How?—In what way?"

"Oh, well, it's just a question of opportunity and ability."

"That we all talk cleverly when we can?"

"Just so, every time, 'cause the man or woman isn't flesh and blood who won't do it when it's possible."

"Perhaps not," she observed, reflectively, thinking that here was the main difference between him and Ben

Ramsbottom—not the quality of mind, perhaps, so much as its range. Ah, but Ben was a lad with a heart of gold! And hearts, thought 'Ola, are better to live with than heads are.

"A man may withstand the wiles of a Jezebel," the American was saying, "the temptations to make millions in a day, the insinuations of a hen-roost, or even the magnetism of first seeing his name in print; but as sure as he is born of a woman he can't resist saying smart things—when he can."

"And what about a woman?" she asked, more lightly.

"Well, she might resist the charms of a new gown, a looking-glass; or she might even——But," he broke in, following her lead in manner, "if I were a woman I should be able to say, and if I were a woman I shouldn't say; you see, because I should just be a woman."

"You'll want a knife soon—won't you?" was the mischievous question, spoken with a leavening of seriousness.

"What for?"

"To cut the knot you're getting into."

"I guess you can cut any knot of that sort without a knife."

"You are a daring young man."

"And should that not be counted to me for righteousness?"

"Why?" asked she, in a serious tone that was touched with humorous surprise.

"Because Fortune gives to every man according to his courage—and his intelligence."

"How do you know?"

"Well, it's one of the articles of my faith—the faith of the optimist."

"Indeed." A single large drop of rain fell on the back of her hand, as it rested on the top bar of the stile. Instantly she jerked her head in the direction of the

weather, then looked again at him and added, "We shall have to hurry—here's the storm." Which showed that she had heard Jinglejoy's unheeded words.

"There can be no storm where your sunshine is," said he, in new courage.

"I don't want flattery, when the real subject is your pessimism about your voice." A deafening clap of thunder broke in.

"I never thought of singing in public. As for pessimism, it's just indifferent souls that take to such indifferent philosophy; and I guess I'm indifferent to nothing that makes for betterment. I'm an optimist, by persuasion."

"You talk a lot of yourself."

"It's the failing of the age; and you can't roll in patchouli without smelling of it."

"And you mustn't blame the skunk because you make a coat of its badly dressed skin."

"Got me again! Snakes, but you do get right there!" In the strength of his momentary outburst he forgot to keep his American idioms and pronunciation somewhat in the background, as he had been doing since he asked for the eggs.

Another big peal of thunder made her put her hands to her ears; then down came the rain.

"Good-evening,—I must go," she said, without giving him a look of any kind; she was already two or three yards along the meadow. "I'll send you the eggs," she called, in the quickening rain, with a swing of her face towards him, that was too rapid either for him to see the expression on it or for her to see him clearly.

"Thanks," he replied, loud enough for her to hear the word. Then he turned on his heel and rounded the sloping bend in the path. But he was no sooner on the other side of the curve than about he swung again, and

was back at the stile in a moment, heedless of the storm; not at the open wooden bars, however. He stood to the right of them, just where a thinness in the hedge allowed him to watch 'Ola run across the meadow, through the wicket-gate beyond, and disappear; he the while being out of her sight, had she turned to look back.

Then, from the jacket pocket where he had carefully placed it—not altogether unseen by 'Ola—he, still sheltering under the overhanging hedge, took out the corn which she had dressed for him, every grain of it, put it into an empty envelope fished from another pocket, and just as carefully stowed the thing away in a fine little pig-skin wallet. Then he became more aware of the splashing rain.

It was prophetic, every bit of it—it must be—it should be; this great field of golden wheat, the last of the year, her father's, to be cut on the morrow, some of which she had prepared for him; the cool green margin of it, on which they had talked to such an understanding of each other; the clear welkin; the deep warmth in everything between earth and sky; the drowsy, contented hum in hedgerow and field; the evidence of comfort all around; the health and general happiness wherein they both abounded; the subtlety of that song—the ostensible purpose of which had not even been mentioned after he sang it—her manner of taking it, and his satisfaction at the way in which he had brought it to her notice, without her so much as thinking that he had written it to her, then extemporised on old air to fit it—it was all prophetic of what the future should bring him, should bring to him and to her. But what of the storm? He threw a hasty glance at the grey black mass above him, as the thunder rolled and rain pelted down. Well, what of it? A storm could make no difference to a real optimist. Then away he sprang again, this time at a swinging pace down the path; his coat-collar turned up and he bending to his

need of the moment that inspiriting old American song, "Marching through Georgia":

"A-aye, yo-ho, oh, yes, she'll marry me!
A-aye, yo-ho, oh, yes, I'll marry her!
And won't we both be happy as the birds
in nesting-time,
While we go marching through Georgia!

"A-aye, yo-ho, oh, what a pair we'll be!
A-aye, yo-ho, lal-lal-lal-lal-lal-lee!
And won't we just be happy as the birds in
nesting-time,
While we go marching through Georgia!"

Whilst the thunder burst in tremendous peals that momentarily deafened him; the heavy rain made the hot fields steam, and lightning ripped the soddened gloom now and then, he ran—still singing, in a way and panting, as he went towards his lodging in the village. He had told himself that it should all prove to be prophetic, this tantrum of Nature excepted; and what Lucian U. Kingdom was determined should happen usually came about, but not always. Love is strong enough to make circumstances at times, to tincture others, yet it cannot always alter them.

A HARVEST HOME

A HARVEST HOME: AND SOMETHING MORE

I

"No, my girl,—one hash for one life is enough; it's as much as is allowed by the practical man who has ballast in him, and I don't think that even my enemies can say that I'm either unpractical or have no ballast—and of course I have some enemies, as every man has that *lives* in the world about him; they're one of the badges of human struggle and endeavour, and one of the certainties of success." With that he finished putting on a clean pair of pig-skin gaiters, and arose to his feet, adding, "So don't think I'm going to make another hash of things." He crossed the tiled floor, sanded, as the stone one had been in their Yorkshire home, and selected a riding-whip from three that hung on a peg between the doorway and that low, broad window, in front of which 'Ola was ironing—a matter of habit with him, for he did not ride nowadays. Had he not refused the request of the local hunt to top his hedges, and said that "he looked on fox hunting as a barbarous child's idea of sport."

"Well," said she, memory making her tone rather doleful, as she turned from the big deal table to change her iron at the fire, "I know you mean well, father, but after——" She checked her inclination to say "what has been."

"Yes?" he interrogated, breaking the pause and moving towards the door.

"Nothing,—only I'm a bit afraid sometimes now," 'Ola answered on her way back to the table.

"There's no need to be. I know what I'm doing as

well, and I think a bit better than I ever did. Besides, I must have a bigger farm; I can't get on with little things. —I was born for big ones, if for anything—big successes or big failures. I must take the high hedges of life——"

"Yes, and that gets you into some of its deep ponds and ditches."

"Well, anyway, plain flat riding in all things is no good to me—I must have a jump of some sort now and then. It's only in big things that I feel I'm strong and can keep my strength up."

"But, as you are fond of saying, there never was an Achilles without a weakness in his heel." She had browsed to good purpose in that small book-lined room of his called the "study."

"That's so, girl—never a strong man in heart and head but that he'd got some of the blemishes of weaker humanity; it's one of the unbreakable laws of Nature, and I have my share. But, at any rate, I'm no sentimentalist to go about with a mouthful of bleating. Let me live by the strength that's in me, and die when that strength's gone."

"I don't think you'll linger long after it, father." There was now a curious touch of humour in her voice, perhaps at the knowledge that deep in his nature there was a strong vein of Biblical sentimentalism.

"That I shan't, 'Ola," he replied, laying his old stress on this pet name of hers,—a pronunciation that was due to excessive affection when she was young. "Anyway," he added, with a return of his desire for her to take more whole-heartedly to what he was doing, "I know I'm a Tyke, and it's said, 'give a Yorkshireman a halter and he'll find a horse.' And I've got more in this than just a spread for my neighbours and a bundle of talk to help it down; and what I've got at stake I'm going to push to a finish."—It was not in him as yet to tell his daughter

that this "stake" was a self-adopted sort of penance—"And a good finish, as some of these sleepy Essexites will find, whether they help me further or not," and he threw out one of his big full-lunged laughs.

With that remark, his burst of pleased feeling, and quoting to himself, "I will sing praises unto thee. . . sing praises unto thee upon a ten-stringed lute," out swung Abe Shuttleworth; the man whose chief weakness was a proneness to talk too much, as 'Ola knew—a tendency that had grown with his years; who had already once wrecked his fortunes, and had practically done the same with the life of his dead wife and that of another woman; yet who held that he was the master of his own fate, both here and hereafter, as others could be if they would. Hence, as will be seen, with a man of his stamp there was the inevitable accompaniment to such an idea that for what he alone was guilty he only should be punished; but, if caught in the right mood, he would not mind sharing with a friend an honour which was solely his own—that is, if no sort of claim was laid to a share of that glory, because if such happened the would-be sharer would have to fight for what he wanted. For some time past there had been at the back of Abe's mind a few thoughts such as these: In one way he had played the fool, played the part till his heart was full, and had paid his scot on that score; in another way he had been the guilty one, not wholly or solely, but perhaps more so than his partner in the matter had been. And in a certain kind of way he was determined to make amends for that. Out of the ruins of those mistakes he was rearing a goodly edifice of atonement; not the *amende honourable* that, perhaps, he ought to make; but, still, it was his way of atoning, and he winced now and then at the recollection of his wife's death, her last few months on earth and of Tamar Pringle. Besides, as 'Ola had told him several times, this was not particularly new on his part—these

efforts to improve village life and to forward the interests of his class. He had done some such work before and had always shown a bent that way; but not with his present motive, nor in the energetic and systematic manner in which he was now working. It was impossible for him to live without his periods of hard striving. As he so often said in other words, and proved his belief in the matter by not altering the rough tenor of his life—a continuously peaceful and easily successful nation produces no great men or women; in the same sense an evenly comfortable life offers no moments either of tragedy or great humour. It is only the inequalities of the earth's surface that makes its mountains and deep seas. So it is in life—great feeling, great poverty, great mistakes, great aspirations, great barriers and other large capacities, warring against the larger denials of fate, make the heavenward peaks and the hellward abysms of human endeavour; and all endeavour is life, for there is no life without striving.

He was not an unusually big man; yet his stature and build were of a kind that always gave the onlooker a curious impression of being in the presence of a really big man. And, as Abe passed through the doorway of that old kitchen, on his way to attend to the final preparations for the harvest-home which was to be held in his big barn that night, his figure seemed, to 'Ola, to loom so large under the low ceiling that he had to stoop in order to clear the transverse black oak beams. As a matter-of-fact, he could just have walked upright under them. But the largeness of his purpose, combined with his success so far, made him feel big at the moment. He was in high spirits, pleased with himself and the world about him; and that fact alone made him hold himself up to his full height, and to thrust out his broad chest to its widest dimensions as he stepped into the open air and strode away towards the barn, out of which the

young boys and girls of the village were then trooping, stuffed with the good things that Abe had provided for them, because of his general love of children.

Meanwhile 'Ola, keeping her own mind yet hoping for the best, completed her ironing, gave some orders to Mercy—her bright-eyed buxom, general help, who had been in another part of the house during the foregone conversation—and went upstairs to dress for the supper. With as much love for her father as many more sentimental daughters have for their parents, she was far from being blind to certain imperfections of his. She knew that he was doing a good work, that already he had exercised a broadening influence on the narrow, plodding, suspicious, modern East Saxon atmosphere around them; but she also knew, from past experiences, that if he was to avoid consequent heart-burnings he would have to make haste more slowly than he was doing. Without her having reduced the matter to this stage exactly, it was in 'Ola's mind that her father was one of those men whose greatest need always was to keep from doing that which urged them most strongly to its execution. Whenever he felt a sudden prompting (and his evil genius was chiefly to act on impulse), or even a more slowly growing desire—but in each case a powerful incentive that came from within rather than from without—to do a given thing, as sure as he lived, after events proved that action to have been one which he should have left undone; and the more sudden and impelling the impulse was, the more should he have kept it down. Judging by this picture in his life, which he always seemed to be unable to see, the rules of his conduct ought to have been: Do that which comes to your hand; leave undone that which you seek, out of your own heart, to do. In another way, the evil was, perhaps, that in certain directions he had too much heart. It was always conceded to him, both then and before, that he had brains and

initiation; even those unfriendly tongues that spoke of his weakness as being due to a different cause than excess of heart, even they commonly admitted that he was "sharp" or was "clever." He certainly had the north-countryman's keen jealousy of his rights and his readiness to fly to the law for redress and opinion; albeit the latter trait was only in large matters with him, because of his thinking that men should fight out small affairs between themselves. To his friends, he had ideas; he had energy, and he had fearlessness—some others would have it that this third possession of his was mostly a lack of discrimination—for which reasons there was no knowing what he might do. Anyway it was said by some that "he would make a fine farmers' M. P." For while the mere plodding and suspicious ones, of the Cawpkins' kind, held back and said, "What do farmers want with M. P.'s?—all they wants is for Parliament to let 'em alone": the others pointed to Abe's strenuous nature; his breezy talk, his hatred of humbug; his experimenting to get better milk; his cross-breeding, started in Yorkshire and continued here, to obtain a cow that would produce more milk than any Dutch cow and of a quality equal to that of a shorthorn; his open-eyed attitude of science in relation to farming; his advocacy in the use of extra-productive, non-deleterious chemicals; his view of labour-saving appliances; his transparent honesty. Thus whilst these and similar traits were commending him more and more to whatever progressive minds there were about him,—and he was beginning to find that there were native Essex farmers with as much grit as he had—the narrow conservative element of an outlying agricultural district was suspecting everything he did and said. Not that 'Ola saw all these matters in this way; her only idea was that her father would ride so hard as to let discretion take the bit between its teeth.

So the afternoon wore into evening, and fine enough

to please even a misanthrope. Night fell. Abe was in the big barn with Jonas Hearty, a man who used long and often mis-pronounced words as swear words, and had a curious way of snorting now and then when he spoke. He was Abe's miller; a widower still under fifty years of age, broad of build but short, black-bearded, tough as a piece of oak, with a slight cast in the right eye and a more pronounced limp in the opposite foot. He was generally suspected of having lived a varied life—and was now almost one of the "Peculiars," who were rather numerous in that locality. In private Jonas was a hardened poacher, either on the land of his respected employer or on that of anyone else; in fact, he was in a purely personal sense, a confirmed Socialist of the levelling-down order; but this was a secret known only to himself and his daughter, towards whom he had a purely business attitude, although for his big, black retriever, Corporal, he had a love approaching that of a sensible mother for her child.

He and Abe now stood to the right of that thirty-feet-long table (which had been improvised out of planks and trestles, the whole matter having been hurriedly arranged and brought to a head, even while the last of the harvest —a field or two of beans and that—were still uncarted home), talking of the arrangements, and trying to make improvements.

In the meantime 'Ola flitted about the table (furnished with hirings from Maldon and Chelmsford, as everybody knew and no one belittled), putting her last touches to the decorations, and seeing that the proper number of what Jinglejoy defined as "eating irons" was laid by each person's plate. In this 'Ola had the assistance of the miller's only offspring, Amariah; to whom he had given a biblical name in the hope that it would enable her to be a more virtuous woman than he had reason to think her mother had been. But she had

now lived long enough to show him that, as he sometimes said, without a thought of worrying over the matter, "It takes more 'an a name to make either a saint or a respect'ble woman." Truth to tell, Amariah—rather slight in build and about the medium height, though of apparently as perfect a shape as need be—had far too much dark beauty, saucy daredevilishness and too little regard of the eternal truths that hedge in womanhood either for her own good or for that of certain young men in the district.

Then in sauntered Madoc Cawpkin; and 'Ola, who had suspected that he would be one of the first to arrive, moved deftly around to the other side of the table. Amariah, however, stood her ground, as she always did where a man and her inclinations were concerned. But her occasional side-long glances were lost on the tall, lanky farmer, whose twenty-six years had put a thin, fair beard on his face, the only distinctive features of which were a stolid expression and an unusually small mouth. There he stood, pulling a straw to pieces, after handing his hat and riding whip to Jinglejoy, his grey eyes taking in, with the slow cautiousness of the typical East Anglian, every detail of the scene. The big, white, perfectly appointed table brightened with flowers — of which he thought there might have been a greater profusion—and heavily laden down the centre with fruit, cold dainties for the end of the feast, and dozens of tall candles in plated candelabra, which were not to be lighted till the doors were closed and the supper commenced; the straw-covered floor; the bunting-draped walls, near which hung, from the old rafters above, a thick row of stable lanterns and anchor-lights which Abe had borrowed that afternoon in Maldon. Presently Madoc turned half-around, noted the partitioned-off end of the barn (where imported cooks were doing their best with a huge open fire, a grille, some utensils and the "ingredi-

ents" of their art,) and strolled around the end of the table to pay his slow respects to his host, who had now sent Jonas to improve the appearance of the flags at the further end of the barn.

As Madoc turned at the end of the hospitable board, giving a half-sideway look and a nod to distant 'Ola, as if to say, "I'm coming along there soon," in walked the Rev. C. Dennison Chapman, rector of the parish—a man of some forty-four years, "low" tendencies, no initiative to speak of, and a cast of features that gave him more work amongst men and women than Nature ever ought to have added to the ordinary labours of a parson. He, too, had more than one purpose in view at this harvest feasting—he who had half-heartedly opposed his host's efforts to brighten village life, saying "it was labour thrown away;" and who, now that the thing was becoming a success, was creeping into popularity along Abe's furrow. Not that the rector deserved much blame for what he did; he was one to be pitied more than censured, because of that deeply inherent shilly-shallying disposition of his. Without Mrs. Chapman's firmer-handed guidance—which was not always perfect because she would persist in keeping in the background of the Rectory and pulling her strings from there—it is hard to say into what muddles and prickly situations he would have worked himself. To-night, for instance, she ought to have been at his side, rather than have sent him there with the instructive advice to follow a certain line of conduct. Apart from all this, however, the rector had a certain dislike to Abe, which was not altogether due to the latter's energy and freedom of speech. It was a known fact that Abe was a man of emotion in some ways. Pity or deep, homely sentiment in action could bring tears to his eyes in a way that caused the rector as much contempt as there was in him to feel. Then there was this Yorkshireman's openly expressed

belief that the best way for two men to settle ordinary disputes was with their fists, providing that weight, science, &c., were about equal. It was not to be expected that a particularly weak and phlegmatic parson would take kindly to a big, breezy farmer who put such ideas so far into practice as to be referee for disputants under these conditions—at least, this much was said of Abe. And, as if he was rather averse to meeting his host there and then, the rector at once turned in the opposite direction to Madoc. 'Ola noticed his movements and met him at that end of the table. She felt that here, at any rate, there was some sort of an offset to the stodgy and too open admiration of the younger neighbour Cawpkin.

It was during the next ten minutes that the majority of the guests came trooping through the farmyard scents and general features, out of the clear but cold autumn night; into the glare, colour, clean straw, and those savoury smells that came from the enclosed end, where the great red glow seemed to bespeak a quiet blacksmith-shop rather than a temporary kitchen. Amongst the first of these were three elderly farmers, one of them being Madoc's uncle, all of whom were attired and behaved much the same as that younger son of the soil. Then came Kester Nobbs, Amariah's chief lover—a well-set-up yokel with a fair moustache, and a geniality that made him loveable in spite of his being a braggart who had a habit of going into things in big ways and mostly coming out of them like a whipped dog that would bite if it dared. Kester was the local carrier; but as, in addition to his general waggon, he owned a two-wheeled cart and a dilapidated dray, he described himself as a "contractor." He was still well under thirty, and so far he had been quietly successful, mostly by sheer good luck. He was also a fully admitted member of the "Peculiar People;"—and his efforts to nurse Jonas into

the fold would have been successful before this, if Jonas could have persuaded himself that Kester would really become his son-in-law. Jonas, not a great saver, was looking ahead to the years when he could not work; and for the assurance of a home in those times with such as Kester, he would readily have embraced anything from "faith-healing" to faith-killing. With an ordinary greeting to Amariah (who had taken up a position that enabled her to be handy to every fresh arrival, and between whom and Kester there was a temporary chill, which was presently to be intensified by this lack of submissive gallantry on his part) he passed on and made for a trio that was composed of 'Ola, the Rector and Madoc, the last of whom was stolidly trying to get between the other two. To her almost visible annoyance, Kester bore the parson off; but, purely as a defensive tactic, 'Ola excused herself on the score that she must go and keep her father company in welcoming the guests.

'Ola reached Abe's side, by the heavy red curtain that hung over the big doorway, just in time to greet one whom she would have been sorry—as her father would—not to have welcomed. This was Nathan Moyle, the wheelwright and smith, a man whose life-story was one of continued sorrow and tenderness; one who had been literally hunted by ill fortune, yet had not thought of shifting the accumulating load on his back; a "Peculiar" whose hopeless struggle had not unset his faith in the "someday-granted" power of prayer. While Abe and 'Ola kept Moyle in conversation, in strolled—laughing and careless as they always were, even in their rivalry—Tom Wade and Dick Warriner, respectively Abe's head-horseman and Moyle's assistant; and in between whiles, as fancy dictated to her, recipients of Amariah's favours. They crossed straight to the latter, and immediately there was a three-cornered explosion of laughs and giggling which apparently came of half whispered remarks

that were not meant for other ears; because Jinglejoy, passing at that moment, turned to them and said:

"Shame, shame; this isn't t' place for talk o' that sort!"

The old man, who was neither a Methodist nor a forgetter of his own youth, had not intended to draw attention on this thoughtless trio; but just to give them a quiet call to their surroundings, as he went by. Feeling, however, had made him speak rather louder than he had purposed. Others had heard his exhortation; and the next instant a score of eyes—in addition to those of the host, his daughter and the parson—were levelled inquiringly, accusatively at the three gigglers, whose merriment was now fast giving way to a mingling of resentful shame and defiance. As it was well-known that Abe's respected old "hoppy" was neither a stickler nor a particular moralist in ordinary to any one, it was felt generally that the young folks must be guilty of having this time gone beyond the bounds of excuse. In fact, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling (who, with Miss Scopes, happened to occupy a central position between Abe and 'Ola, the offending trio, and another small group made up of the Rector, Mrs. Briggs—the widowed postmistress, who found a profitable hobby in breeding a good strain of black pigs—Madoc's uncle and another farmer) said severely, as she threw a look from the guilty ones to Abe, then turned on her heel and optically challenged the parson:

"Such goings-on are scandalous in respectable company."

"Well, it isn't quite right," ventured Miss Scopes.

If it had not been for two factors in the case, this somewhat unimportant matter might have gone much further there and then. The first was Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling (a five-year resident in the village, with the ambition to be known and spoken of as "Dame Hinckson-Tiffling").

She had come from no one knew where in the great London which she claimed as her birth-place and rearing-ground, and was generally disliked for everything but that alone which she gave—monetary charity—and that at times too freely to escape destructive criticism. It was her misfortune generally to be uncharitably suspected on the whole—for what special reasons no one seemed to know—of having no *locus standi* in a subject on morality merely. It had often been said, by narrow souled creatures of prejudice, that her liberal-handedness was only the price that conscience made her pay for the manner in which she had come by her money. Even her right to "Mrs." had been doubted, by the same class of persons, of course. However, although her better neighbours had preferred to believe her in charity, rather than doubt her in truth, this underlying reputation put her out of court in the present instance. As for Miss Scopes—well, how could she judge rightly of such an affair? Was she not an old maid, already over sixty (as old Simmons and the parish register could prove), had lost eighteen years in a futile courtship, and was known to be in possession of a wonderfully fine night-dress, which she had made for the bridal that never came about and was now preserving for her burial gown? To say nothing of other slight peculiarities, how could a person of her kind be allowed to stand in judgment on such talk as the shocked ones thought Jinglejoy had heard? They went unheeded. The other factor was Abe. With everything else going so well, and he so much at peace with the world generally he was not disposed either to make trouble over some remark that no important person had heard, nor to have the proceedings interrupted by a matter that could be safely elbowed out of the way. Hence he looked around smilingly, as he said:

"Now, Jinglejoy, you mustn't have one of your evan-

gelist fits on to-night, you know. We've all got to remember sometimes that we were young once; and the young folks must be allowed a bit more latitude than what we want for ourselves."

As this oil fell on the troubled waters, in stepped dapper little Pinch Jellie, of whom Abe had made a secret enemy by making him the butt of many a too pointed joke. A retired grocer from Maldon, he was locally known as "the Lady,"—witness his pair of "loudly" striped trousers; his white waistcoat, double-breasted; his morning coat of the latest London style and with a flower in the button hole; his new brown kid gloves, and a silk hat which he took off as he bowed to Abe and 'Ola, then balanced on the buckhorn handle of a fine Malacca cane, as he held the curtain aside with his other hand for another person to pass in; the while he wished, with all his little heart, that he could have shaken the big farmer. The other person was Mrs. Moriety, an exceedingly well-preserved, thrice-made widow of about forty-five years, rather pathetic in manner and speech, who kept the Hare and Hounds and, in her leisure time, fended off a number of would-be suitors, amongst whom Jonas Hearty loomed rather largely.

And, as Mrs. Moriety monopolised the attention of the host and hostess at the moment, Pinch Jellie (to whose name but few persons ever added "Mr.," except to his face, or as "Mr. P. J." when he was not there) turned his rather Machiavellian features, with their pointed beard and gossip-hunter's nose—a very twin to Boswell's—into the barn. With his shrewd, keen, grey eyes and his subtle intentions on a group composed of the Rector, Mrs. Gittings and Hiram Dunstan (a man who had run through a fortune to commonsense and was now making a fresh start in life as a small-holder), "the Lady" drew near the late offenders of propriety, who were now talking in semi-whispers and proper decorum.

Catching the sparkling eye of Amariah, he paused long enough to say in a subdued tone, and shaking his head knowingly:

"That's just like you women. How you do like to play with fire, yet how you do fear to be burnt!"

"Don't you open your mouth to make a fool of yourself," she quickly replied, then turned again to her companions, leaving him, as Dick Warriner afterwards said, "to walk away with his bad change." During her twenty-two years Amariah had drifted about the country too much with her father to have any distinctive dialect.

Then, as Pinch Jellie—the man who was always striving to possess himself of small pieces of local property; whom no one took seriously enough to understand properly, except Mrs. Chapman, who kept her divination to herself and her more obtuse husband, he only half believed her in this matter—went gaily along the barn, like a sort of poisonous orchid in a kitchen garden, there came that which put a finish to the fading intensity that had threatened the geniality of the evening. This was a strong, but not unkindly, voice calling:

"Hi, there, where's Mr. Shuttleworth? Is Mr. Shuttleworth inside?"

Whilst the pleased remark, "Here's Mr. Varley," passed from mouth to mouth, accompanied by smiles; Abe held the curtain aside and stepped into the aperture to greet the speaker, who was sitting astride a sturdy donkey not three yards away. When Abe had given his hearty welcome to the newcomer, the latter said:

"But I want to know what to do with Jerry. The stables are all full, and I can't leave him out in the cold after his run. Can't a hodman have a living, as well as a prince?—He does his work in life!"

"Oh, we'll soon have Jerry's wants attended to," the host replied, with a laugh, then looked back into the barn to call one of his men.

At this moment Lucian came up, grasped the situation and offered to find the donkey a shelter. So out of his saddle slipped the rider, saying that this was too kind of a gentleman to be refused; and, whilst he entered the barn with Abe, the animal was led away by Lucian, who had artfully secured an invitation to the feast by entering the big cornfield, while the harvesters were at work, engaging Abe in an argument, then joining the workers as a volunteer.

Inside the barn it was at once seen what a general favourite was this old man, whose face glowed with pleasant feeling. As he took off an old-fashioned yet well-kept silk hat, showing a thick head of hair that had been silvered by his eighty-one years, and unwound a woollen "comforter" from his neck, there were twenty pairs of hands ready to relieve him of them. At this Pinch Jellie was heard to say, in that usual, light vein of sarcasm which only his intimates knew to be more than surface-deep, "Ah, see what it is to be loveable, yet too old for feminine acquisitiveness."

This, however, passed unheeded; and Mr. Varley pursued his quiet way through the lane of welcomers to the head of the barn, where, when Lucian entered and paid his respects to 'Ola and her father, the old man stood, talking to the postmistress.

"Gee wiz, I say, but that's what I call just pretty!" said the young man, as if to himself; but to which possible supposition he at once gave the lie by adding, as he half-turned to 'Ola, "Don't you think so?"

"Think what?" she asked, seeing his meaning by the direction of his gaze, then throwing a sidelong glance of examination at her father and the curtain.

"Why, that," and he nodded towards Mrs. Briggs and Mr. Varley, who were standing a little forward of the big red glare which the huge unseen fire threw across the opening in the partition that shut off the "kitchen."

"Say, now, isn't that right up against any fancy drawing-room picture that you ever saw?"

"Right what?" inquired 'Ola, smiling tantalisingly.

"Well, I'm right sorry," he remarked, with a slight change of manner.

"Sorry at what?"

"That my Amuricanisms don't quite sugar you down; but all the same you know what I mean there," and again he nodded his head at the pair in the firelight.

'Ola's inclination had been to quiz him pleasantly for a few minutes, as she had done on some three or four occasions since that meeting at the stile. But this sudden, although scarcely perceptible touch of offended sensitiveness had thrown her mind into a new direction, had put into it a channel of half-serious inquiry as to what really lay behind Lucian's habituary brightness. Thus aroused —not the first time—by his contrasting the scene before them with a "fancy" drawing-room one, 'Ola followed up this dawning desire; and for some minutes a light-toned conversation, based on his comparison and searching yet guarded on her part, passed between them.

And there, still talking and backed by the red glow, stood Mrs. Briggs and Mr. Varley, both about the same height—she unusually square, in more matters than mere build; her practical, scholastic manner in conversation contrasting awkwardly with a naturally sunny disposition; her trim coils of black hair—symbols of the neatness of her general doings—dark eyes and fearless gaze, swarthy skin and red cheeks, an ample mouth with a rather hairy upper lip; her wine-coloured velvet frock, relieved only by a small piece of lace at the throat, and a long gold chain from her neck to the old gold watch in her waistband,—all serving as a composite foil to his square figure, half-hidden in a frockcoat between the opening of which his butcher's blue apron was plainly seen, tucked up at one corner; for Mr. Varley, now some

twelve months retired from business, always wore the uniform of his trade, as he always had done, even in his duties as sidesman of a neighbouring parish church; although he did, on Sundays and holiday occasions, hide it beneath the frockcoat that had served him at such times during the past forty years.

II

It was at this juncture that Abe asked 'Ola if all the guests had arrived. A scrutiny of faces and figures followed, and 'Ola announced that all were present, except two or three whose absence did not matter much. Then father and daughter went about their delicate task of allotting places at the table—delicate because of possible jealousy, as 'Ola pointed out to him in a whisper. When this was done—and the rustle of straw had given way to no more than a hubbub of tongues, leaving the host with the Rev. Dennison on his right, Mr. Varley on his left (to the secret disappointment of Mrs. Briggs, who was said to be "setting her cap" at Abe) the better class of the guests stretching down to the middle of the board, and the harvesters and farmhands generally surrounding the lower half, with 'Ola to do the honours at the foot of the table—Lucian having insisted on a seat by her side, to help her; much to her secret joy and to the rather open chagrin of Madoc, who had found himself placed between Miss Scopes and Mrs. Gittings, when this was done, Abe said in a loud voice,

"Order, please, while the Rector says grace." Grace was said. Then Abe added, solely with the desire to put everybody at ease, "Now, friends and neighbours, I hope you are all going to do justice to the meal there is before you. There's wine and water for the ladies, ale and temperance drinks for the men and anyone else that wants them; and the less there is left of anything the better I shall like it."

With this the clatter began; and, excepting Madoc,

Amariah—who still smarted under that reprimand of Jinglejoy's—and two or three stolid farmers in whose hearts there was jealousy at Abe's success on worse soil than they had tilled season after season for no more than a bare living, a merrier company never sat around a board. Nor was this interrupted by an early hitch that occurred in the meal, due to a huge sirloin falling into the ashes just when it was wanted, because the improvised spit had given way. On the contrary, the occasion was seized as a suitable break, an interlude for diversions, and a time in which appetite might recover itself enough to resume the attack with unabated vigour. It happened that Jinglejoy had a seat at the middle of the table, next to Madoc's uncle, who presently said to the old man:

"By George, your master'll flog the cat for this—Won't he? Some on you'll have to pay for all this feasting afore the winter's gone."

"Noa, we shan't," replied Jinglejoy, who had served Abe's father and had borne his master company from the ruins of the Yorkshire homestead. Then he added, in a purposely louder voice than the elder Cawpkin had used, "Arr maister flogs noa cats. Wot he spends he spends, an' that's the end on it."

"Then he must be an odd un, my boots on that!" was the half-growled disbelief of the farmer, as he turned his head again to the table.

"Them's the truest words yo've spokken to-day; keep 'em in yor mind, sir," the greybeard answered. "An' it's as arr maister ses—let's all mend arr own thatch first."

"Jingle!" It was the curiously full voice of Abe, who always addressed his hedger-and-ditcher by the first portion of his nickname. "Jingle, come and sing us a song, while we're waiting!"

To get out of his seat at the end of the bench the old man had to squeeze up some one a little, and in deference

to Cawpkin's social position, this was Amariah, who sat immediately on his left. With a rebutting elbow against his spare side, and much more impressively than she intended, while she winked to Dick Warriner across the table, Amariah asked who he was trying to sit on—because if he wanted a nurse, she was not looking for a baby with whiskers. Heedless of this, which the general babel prevented from going beyond four or five pairs of ears, Jinglejoy, in twisting himself clear, told her that she must come and "vamp" for him—which she usually did when he sang at a village concert. Then that cast in his dexter eye, which was much worse than Jonas Hearty's, shot athwart the long face and dull eyes of Cawpkin, and the general effect was something that lay beyond the reach of description. At the same time Amariah turned a quick, inquiring look at the back of his head; it was a sharp glance that contained more than a question.

Amariah tripped along the rustling straw after the old man, to the carpeted floor of a flat wagon that stood at the end of the barn, had to be reached by a pair of household "steps," and had 'Ola's piano for an orchestra. At their appearance the big buzz of conversation became a loud jumble of approval, broken here and there by a louder voice at the further part of the table calling out for a particular song. Some wanted "Barbara Allan," others "The Lincolnshire Poacher," and other old-time things which Jinglejoy was known to sing in his own peculiar sweet way. A few asked for some of the so-called humorous music-hall ditties of the time; but, with no attention to any request, the old man whispered to Amariah, who at once began to play the opening bars of "The Farmer's Boy." In the middle of the first stanza, however, it became evident that something was wrong. There were half-audible queries, put to no one in particular, as to what was the matter. Amariah was "vamp-

ing" a mere jumble of notes, with now and then a bar or so of the song. Then someone, no one knew quite who, put a head to the affair by calling out,

"Why, the chit's tryin' to put him out o' tune!"

That was it. Into her quick head, when he had said that she must play for him, there had come the idea to "put him out," as a Roland for his Oliver of correction. To her it was just a joke, far too fine and too big a joke to be allowed to go unused. As for anyone taking umbrage at it, especially at such a merry-making affair as this one was—to her—such a likelihood had never entered her skittish mind. It was for this reason that she was astounded into quietude by the serious cries of "Shame, shame!" "Stop it!" and the like from her own part of the table; while from the upper portion there was much facial and low-toned surprise, with Abe's masterly, "Order, order!" drowning all else.

It was at this point only that Jinglejoy ceased to sing, and the threatening tumult died away. Then Abe stood up, turned towards the dray, and said sternly, "Amariah, come down from there." The culprit descended, far more abashed than she had been over the previous affair, with all eyes but three or four obvious pairs gazing at her in accusing wonder. Yet it was not Abe's intention either to punish her further, or to have the jollity marred. He contented himself with giving her a severe look, as she went by; then he turned again and glanced at the foot of the table, saying, "'Ola, come and play for him."

As 'Ola made for the wheeled platform, there was an impressive silence, a peace that was hardly pleasant. But this feeling quickly gave way to one of rapt attention and deep satisfaction. Although he was devoid of any "musical education," the old hedger-and-ditcher had the true singer's heart. That north country ballad was as dear to him as a sunny day. To have Miss 'Ola accompany him, which was done with sympathy, was an honour

that called out his best efforts. In his singing there was little dialect at any time, and less now than ever; so that he sang every line of the ballad with a depth of feeling that, in addition to his unusually sweet voice, went home to the heart of his listeners; till, at the end, even the stolid and cautious Essexmen rapped and thumped the table, making knives and forks dance to the shouts of "Encore!" Either the meal was forgotten, or the sirloin could wait; in any case there must be more of "The Farmer's Boy" or another song. Some of his fellow-workers at the further end of the board stood up with their glasses and drank loud toasts to him. But still he waited—a curious, little, seemingly decrepit figure in a velveteen "sleeved waistcoat," an expression of quiet pleasure on his wrinkled face and that crossed right eye on Abe, who had turned to watch him as he sang. He was waiting for his master's word to sing again. And this came, in a well-understood nod. Then Jinglejoy and 'Ola had a few moments' conversation, after which she played and he sang—a long-forgotten harvest ditty that 'Ola had hunted out at his reiterated request for "sumthing owd enough to be new"—

"Our oats they are howed, and our barley's reaped,
Our hay is mowed, and our hovels heaped;
Harvest home! harvest home!
We'll merrily roar out our harvest home!
We'll merrily roar out our harvest home!

"We cheated the parson; we'll cheat him again;"

(Laughter almost drowned the next line, and the formerly unpopular subject of it knew why it was not all in a merry note.)

"For why should the rector have one in ten?
One in ten, one in ten!
For why should the rector have one in ten?
For why should the rector have one in ten?

For staying while dinner is cold and hot,
And pudding and dumpling 's burnt to pot;
Burnt to pot! burnt to pot!
Till pudding and dumpling 's burnt to pot,
Burnt to pot! burnt to pot!"

(During the pause the table was in a somewhat subdued ferment of delight.)

"We'll drink off the liquor while we can stand,
And hey for the honour of old *England!*
Old England! old England!
And hey for the honour of old England!
Old England! old England!"

Now, more than ever, the black rafters rang with "Hurrah!" "Bravo!" "Well done, Jinglejoy!" and the like, which sent an old owl, some bats and roosting sparrows from the gable ends panic-stricken into the glare of the lamps, and effectually drowned the rather shocked remarks of Miss Scopes, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling and a few others. Jinglejoy and 'Ola came down from the dray. The cooks and servers hurried back to their interrupted labours. And still the laughter and appreciative comments held on; while the Rector sat with a forced smile on his face that proclaimed him to be a man of no humour. Even Mr. P. J. good-naturedly said, "When some people open their mouths they sing; when others open theirs there's a draught."

The supper was renewed. That great sirloin and much else disappeared. Then Abe stood up, glass in hand, and said:

"The King, ladies and gentlemen—the King and the soil of England; may the one flourish as long as life will let him and the other for ever."

More eating followed, and with what gusto dish after dish was cleared!—"more good money wasted," said Pinch Jellie in quiet cynicism to his neighbour, the schoolmistress, who was known to be a person of much

care where expense had to be considered. At length the Rector arose, and Abe called for order.

"Dear friends." He could not bring himself to include the men and women further down the board in "ladies and gentlemen;" so, after a vain search for inspiration on the table, and not having been made of the same stuff as orators are, he resumed with the safe, "Dear friends, it has fallen to my pleasant duty—which I'm sure I appreciate better than I fear you will enjoy my efforts to put it before you."—"Amen to that," muttered Pinch Jellie to the schoolmistress, who smiled sickly in remembrance of past surrenderings to the non-argumentative autocracy of her clerical employer; while further down the table Jonas Hearty and two or three more secretly murmured something much the same as "the Lady's" remark.

The Rector blew his nose, as a whip-up for another start, wished he had taken his wife's advice not to try the thing in this impromptu manner, then dashed into, "It has fallen to my pleasant duty to propose 'The Success of Farming,' and to that I gladly add, and you will gladly drink ("Hear, hear!" from several places near the foot of the table) the health of our genial host and hostess." Here the approval was general. "You know, friends, we do not often meet in this manner—" Faintly came the reminder, "Harvests on'y come once a year." "That is quite true, my friend, whoever you are. But we must be satisfied, because if we had too many blessings in this life they might spoil us for the next——"

"That's a fact, sir," said a harvester, who had already emptied his fourth pint and appeared to be none the worse.

"Order, order," put in Mr. Waylett, a big-nosed man who kept the village store and was the parishioner's churchwarden.

"Be quiet down there," said Abe, rather sternly.

Thus admonished, the interrupters became silent; and the Rector was allowed to continue, with no more than an occasional "Hear, hear." At length the toast was drank, with so many times "Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" that the women put their hands to their ears, and Jinglejoy told Amariah—with whom he had again become quite friendly—that it would take another barrel of ale to clear their throats after the shouting. Finally there was some degree of quietude. Another course came and went. Then Abe stood up to respond; and 'Ola, with a furtive glance up the board, secretly hoped that he would not say too much. Jonas, Pinch Jellie, Jinglejoy and Mr. Varley all rapped the table with their glasses for silence, and Abe began, his tall, strong figure and tawny red hair and beard making a bold object between the clerical garb and clean-shaven face on one side and the white hair and frockcoat on the other.

"Friends and neighbours, on behalf of my daughter and myself I thank you as heartily, for the way in which you have drunk this toast, as it's possible to do so with one voice. It does a man good—it's worth a year of hard work to find himself surrounded by a company of this sort and under conditions such as these. I wouldn't ask for better if I were a king; in fact, to my thinking, I'm a jolly sight happier here to-night than any king in Europe—and a great deal more safe and contented than most of them are. In fact, I can safely say 'to-night I am drunk, but not with wine.'" While these remarks were being greeted with approval, Abe paused, cleared his throat, then resumed: "Before I came here—in lambing time, two years and a half ago—I always understood that Essex was a mean country; that its people were mean and had made its soil mean (in vain did 'Ola throw a cautionary glance at him)—that it was the all-round meanest country in the kingdom, bar none. And I still sometimes think there's much truth in it; but that's only when things

go wrong, as they will do with all of us now and then; because I'm convinced, experience has convinced me, that Essex has only to be properly understood and properly worked to be as good a farming country, one way or another, as any other in the land. To my humble way of thinking, Essex is the Cinderella of the counties. She's been badly treated, if I may say so—very badly treated, and that by her own people; but she's coming into her own again by-and-bye. What I mean—and I mean no offence to any one in particular—is that farming in Essex has been, in my opinion, very much like the townsman and his 'indigeneous potatoes.'"

Two or three of the company, who had previously heard something about these potatoes and wanted to hear more, called out:

"Tell it, tell it!"

"Let's hear it!"

"Well," said Abe, in a light, smiling, story-telling manner, his big arms loosely folded across his chest, when the little tumult had subsided, "a certain man left a town to live in the country—I expect it must have been one of those nation-towns, like London. You see, he had been a townsman all his life, never seeing God's sky without smoke and a row of houses handy, if not streets of them. So we must bear this in mind when we come to the verdict—he needed a bit of charity, as most of us do. Anyhow, he suddenly dropped in for a tidy annuity. So, having been a diligent lad at a certain night-school, where he had learnt a lot of isms, &c., and other things taught by university extensions and that—oh, I'm not against book-learning, in its place, mind you; I'm as fond of a book as anyone, *when my day's work is done.* Well, having got his little annuity, his isms and a good bumping fill-up of office niceties, he thought he'd had enough of it all, and that he'd go into the country to live the simple life he'd read about, and bring his children up to Nature

in sandals and bare heads and rough winsey frocks—that is, them that were not already too towny. So he scoured round and got hold of an old farmhouse and moved his family there, to the delight of his children, of course; and presently to the grumbling disgust of his wife, who missed the clatter of the buses, the shop-windows and the glare of the streets at night. I'm sorry that this is getting a bit long and round-about; but——"

"No, it isn't!"——

"Go on with the tale!"——

"Never mind!" were a few of the good-natured interruptions; while Pinch Jellie said to himself, "Lot of tommy-rot!"

"You see," Abe continued, amidst the other voices, "you have to know all the man's story or you can't appreciate the 'indigeneous' properly. However, any of you that are too hungry to wait a bit had better get some pudding, or have some fruit or fill your glasses again." There was a general disclaimer about being too hungry to wait, mixed up with sundry other calls for "the tale;" so Abe continued: "Well, as I said, the man moved into an old farmhouse—oh, he wasn't the man to be satisfied with a jerry-built 'villa' on a new 'estate'—not he, indeed; as the Dutchman said, when he did a thing he did it. Anyhow, he got there. It was early summer when he went in; and the tops of potatoes were nicely up here and there, dotted about anyhow, but pretty thick, over half an acre of the three acres he had with the house. Well, for all he knew, they might be the tops of tobacco plants, or asparagus. But he was a bit spry for all that. You see, those isms had taught him that there were some things that he didn't know; but he wasn't going to own up to that amongst a lot of yokels—not likely. The fact is, so far as I can see, he was a man; that is, he was a bit of a fool and a bit of a wiseacre, according to each case as it came along. So this certain man just kept quiet

till he learnt, casually, that the things were potatoes; and, being a careful man, he had them attended to. Then in due season, as the Book says, he bagged what he thought was a very good crop of 'tuberous roots.' He didn't know that they were very uneven and inclined to run small; and being a careful man, as I said—I might say a *very* careful man, but not exactly a mean man—he just had every potato gathered up. What was too small for the table was big enough for the pig, and we know that was quite right; it's what I call learnèd instinct. The man who dug them up for him and did his gardening generally, wasn't much of a talker; he just asked a question when necessary and did his work; he wanted to know if the owner wouldn't put some spring cabbages into that piece of ground where the potatoes came from. But the man said no, and kept his thoughts to himself and bided his time. Then spring came again, as we in the country know they will come. The old potatoes were all gone, and this certain man's wife was buying at high prices. And summer came; and that piece of land was bare, because whenever the gardener had asked if he should put this or that into the land, the owner had said no, and kept his thoughts and bided his time. And every day he went and looked at that land, in long and careful looks, when no one was looking at him—looked at it he did till you'd have thought his stare would bring potato-tops through the ground. In fact, he only needed the faith of a faith-healer to have become a faith-grower on the spot. Then an old friend of his who'd been living in the country a few years, but a long way off, came to see him. And when they were walking over the place, the friend said—'Well, you're doing very well with the ground except here. What have you got in here?' 'Oh, that's the potato ground,' said this certain man. 'Potatoes,' said his friend. 'They must be wonderfully late ones. When did you put them in?' 'Put them in?' the man asked. 'Yes,' his friend

answered. Then the man said, 'I didn't put them in. I'm waiting for them to come up. They're indigeneous potatoes.' "

Abe could go no further just then. The hollow roof of the big place echoed with roars of laughter that filled every corner and crevice to over-flowing. Although to so many of them, "indigeneous" was a foreign word, their daily dealings with Mother Earth caused them to miss no jot in the point of the story. When comparative silence was restored, while aching sides were being held, and overturned glasses, &c., were put into more respectable positions, Abe resumed,

"You see, friends, the previous occupier had left the little ones on the ground, when he was digging up his potatoes, just before leaving; and they'd got turned in again, naturally. That was why this certain man's crop was irregular and ran small. What he didn't know about potatoes he knew about words; and as he left no little ones behind—he was a careful man, you must remember—there was no second crop, not a single potato to satisfy that faith-stare of his."

He knew that there was no need to give this explanation, but he wanted it for his purpose. He had gained his object, put his hearers into good humour with themselves; and now, whilst the younger ones smiled and made eyes at each other, and their elders laughed or chuckled and passed obvious comments—according to temperament or mood—Abe took a drink, then made for the more serious things at his heart.

"And it seems to me—" ("Order, order!" "Silence!" came from two mouths somewhere near the middle of the board; as 'Ola shot an appealing look at her father and half a dozen of Amariah's turn of mind wondered if speech-making was to occupy the remainder of the evening) "generally speaking, it seems to me that's how Essex has been farmed—on the religion of 'take all out and

put nothing in.' That's why the land has come to be so poor in many parts; that it won't grow anything, and farms can be had for a song; or could be in most of the county; except where farmers have come down from Scotland and the shires and done the right thing by feeding the impoverished land. Now, I ask you: (he now saw 'Ola's eyes on him, but his evil spirit was in possession) Can farming be done in that way?——"

"No, no, 'course it can't," cried someone, who was followed by similar remarks from other quarters; while the Cawpkins and a couple more of their kind sat suspicious and glum.

"No—you're right, it can't. And what's more, it can't be done by keeping on in the everlasting same old rut. If you—I mean anybody—want to get along the road you must move as the times move, you must go with them. And if you can't jig your own turnout along the road, then get a lift for a while on the back-step of some one else's. Did I do things, when I first came here, just as I'd done the same things elsewhere, utterly regardless of local conditions and necessities? If you knew all, and some of you know enough of it, you would know that I did nothing of the sort. What I did was to set about finding out what the country was best noted for; what it could breed and grow best, and would be accepted in the market as real Essex; and what could best be got away from here to the nearest centres of demand. Those were the two main lines on which I worked—them and commonsense generally all mixed up with a proper farmer's training." It was due to this success that he had begun to buy the farmstead and much of the land. "I say a proper farmer's training; but I don't want to seem bumptious; nor a scrap better than my neighbours. ("An' you're not," muttered the elder Cawpkin to himself and took a deep drink.) What I mean is, and I'm proud of this fact, at any rate, my father was an unusu-

ally successful farmer who started on a small scale, and who combined farming with grazing on a well-thought-out set of principles as to so much land for each head of cattle, &c., and what he learnt in hard practice he taught to me, and I'm carrying out here so far as they're applicable to the soil of Essex. ('Ola sighed imperceptibly at the thought of what he had done with the fortune left by that father, and at the dangerous ground near which he was treading with such assurance; while two of his neighbours murmured inaudibly, "Marv'lous man!") "I'm not going to talk now of my poor efforts to improve farming life and country life generally. We'll have some of that presently. What I want to talk about just now is the training of the farmer himself. But mere training is not enough in farming, any more than leather is enough to make a pair of shoes. What I believe, and what I maintain, is that to make more than just a living, a man must be a natural farmer—what I claim to be, one who was born with the scent of the soil in his blood; like my father before me. This is my only boast; so don't be afraid I shall make another. As for anything else outside farming—well, as the old song says:

"'I ask nae—Be ye Whig or Tory?
For Commonwealth or Right Divine?
Say, Dear to you our England's glory?
Then gie's a hand o' thine.'

"All the same, to make the best of it we must have education. What I mean by education is progress; education that will teach us how to get £6 or seven or even eight out of the acre where we only got five. It's no use going at it like a bull at a windmill or 'just as me father did.' We must change our ways as things around us change; but most of all, as farmers, I mean, we must understand the soil on which we live—we must be akin to it. To my way of thinking, the man that gets his living on

the land—that is, him who tills it for his own benefit—must be much in sympathy with it as to feel there is an actual tie between them. As for making things pay—well of course, there's the 'G. E. R.' to contend with down here—a line that has the monopoly of three counties, rubs it into farmers and can't make ends meet. Then there's the question of labour, of keeping things a bit too tight, which I'm afraid many of us farmers do. As my father proved, you can hoe a sack of corn on to an acre, or you can let it grow as it can and lose the sack. Well, that hoeing costs five shillings and you get fifteen to twenty for the sack of corn. Does it pay, then, to be mean about things? But I don't want to weary you with things that some of you may have thought as much about as I have——"

"Go on, go on!"

"We beant tired!"

"I am," was P. J.'s half-whispered remark.

These and similar interruptions encouraged him to continue. Just then Jinglejoy, who had been out of the barn about something, re-entered, shuffled up to 'Ola and whispered, "Come ahtside, Miss, pleäse; there's a lady wants ta see th' maister." With that he shuffled off to the entrance, his young mistress at his heels.

"Well, it's very kind of you to sit here listening to my long talk, with your plates spoiling, when you ought to be feasting——" "Gettin' more appetite, sir!" cried one, to the merriment of others.—"So I'll just finish the few remarks I have in mind, and later on I'll tell you what I think we farmers ought to do in the way of further co-operating with one another; because, you know we farmers, big and little alike, haven't taken kindly to ideas of coöperation; yet we all know there's strength in binding—we admit it daily in the harvest field. Then there's the question of what we might do with our workers to make things better for them and for us; about village

life, as it is and it might be; fighting the railway company for better rates; this question of back to the land and a few other things." After being once more interrupted with applause, for these were the "improvements" at which he had been working so hard during the past eighteen months, he resumed. "I've said that in my opinion we ought to be closely akin to the land, if we're to make a success on it. I believe my success is due to being akin to it in three ways, in body, rearing and sympathy. We all are in one way, bodily. But some of us—I don't mean anyone present though I've known even farmers of that sort—are so high and mighty in our thoughts—petty and mean, I call it—that we should like to think we were made of something much finer, more rarified, than earth and water; we should like to think that the Almighty had turned us out of some special gold-filled sort of clay that wasn't clay,—yes, that's just it, gold-filled—gold-filled in two ways, or rather in two sections; there's the section that's gold-filled as regards its pockets only; and there's the section that's just like the 'gold-filled' jewellery of to-day—all show, pretence and nothing for to-morrow. But that won't do for the farmer of to-day—not if he's going to make more than a hand-to-mouth living out of it. If you're going to do market-gardening, and do it properly, you can make a profit out of a few acres. A man can live and keep a family on less, if he knows how and doesn't care about his old age. But if you're going to farm land, you must *know* it; and the more you have of it the better, up to a certain limit—which is that of your own ability to manage properly. What I mean is this. If you can keep it all in good working order, either by producing crops or grazing cattle, five thousand acres are not too much. (The Cawpkins and a couple more farmers gazed at each other in a sort of horror.) I had two-thirty when I came here; now I have four hun-

dred and next year I'll make it six or seven hundred, if I can get it at a fair rent and without taking it from another man; and every perch of it shall be put to use. (Here 'Ola returned to her seat; but it was evident to Lucian, and would have been so to her father if his "talk" had not so completely absorbed him, that a great change had come over her since she went out.) At the same time it isn't my intention, nor do I think it's right to crush out the small man. If we know our business as we ought to, we know that we all have to be small before we can be big—Nature says so in everything, and Nature knows these things a great deal better than we can ever learn 'em. What I mean is that there's none too many natural farmers to go round, and the man who can do better on a thousand acres than on a hundred or two is sure to get 'em if he goes the right way about it. Because the man that's properly farming a thousand acres—and there ought not to be an acre in the country that isn't helping to feed the nation in some way or other, not in these days—I say that the man who's farming a big farm as it should be farmed, as all land should be farmed, is giving work, and regular work, to men who would otherwise be getting a scraggy living through nine months of the year and starving through the other three; and if that farmer has the right heart in him, his men will be doing, or able to do, what every man should be able to do—put by a bit for his old age." "Hooray! Hooray!" and similar cries were roared out, chiefly around the further half of the table; for it had already been rumoured that he was about to give his men a bonus in addition to their present wages. "As for small farming and small holders generally, I believe that by putting a man on his feet on the land you make a patriot; he's got a stake that he'll fight for. Give him bare bread and cheese and he'll sit sullen, while you do the fighting—and right, too. But he must be the right sort

of man; he must feel that in tilling the soil he's working with a friend that will always be true to him if he only humours it now and then. But, as I said before, I'm not going to weary you with things that I'm *living and going to live* rather than talk about. I'll finish for the present, and we'll get on with the supper, before the rest of it spoils, or you all get too hungry for the things to go round; then I'll tell you a bit more later on. But, in case I forget it afterwards, let me say this now: Whatever else we do, first of all let us be alive—alive!" The sleepy Rector looked up at him suddenly. "That's the evil with us country folk—we're not enough alive; if we were we should be more up-to-date and better off; and no man would play the petty tyrant over another, and we all know there's a lot of that going on around us." Again on the lower part of the table there was an applauding clatter that had a significance of its own, while some of the Cawpkins's element grunted disapproval. Abe continued with, "What I say is—give us life, life, life; healthy, strong and vigorous life; if we can get it; but, anyhow, give us life—let us be alive!"

At this Abe sat down; and what with verbal applause, the hammering of empty glasses, and butts of knife-handles, &c., on the table, the din was deafening. But there were four or five guests whose approval was lukewarm enough to be noticed by some of the others. This amazing candour had fairly got hold of the majority of his hearers; apart from the good things it foreshadowed, it was so new to them that it took them by storm. This egoism, without any emphasis on "I" in any of its forms; this ever present personal matter without fear or favour had won particularly on Lucian. But here there was an affinity of ideas; for the latter had been suckled, reared and educated on the personal element in life; so that aloofness of all kinds was foreign to him. While in those few backward employers the egoism of it all, an

outcome of some Irish blood in Abe's veins, was arousing opposition and stolid dislike, in spite of a deep interest which they could not avoid showing even through their Essex suspicion and cold reserve. And at the back of the minds of the hired ones generally—in whom speech was slow, words were few and there ever lurked a distrust of the man who had much to say—there was a vague belief that this man of the shires, with his many words and his plain showing of what he felt, was making the road hard to his own feet, was yoking in a team which he would find most difficult to drive. Nor was this idea unaccompanied by a sneaking feeling of pleasure; for it must be admitted that the Essex rustic—much the same as the average East Anglian workman—would rather see his fellow native succeed against him than the stranger be successful on his behalf.

Towards the end of the uproar, 'Ola went to her father, whispered something to him, and together they left the barn—he excusing his absence to the Rector and one or two others, she silent and curiously preoccupied.

III

"WELL, what is it, my girl?" asked Abe, as he and 'Ola stepped through the wicket-door in the great ones of the barn; he in nowise feeling the sharp chilliness of that autumn night, although he had come straight and bare-headed from an atmosphere that was super-heated in comparison to it; she half-intentionally trying to hide a shivering that was not wholly due to this sudden change of air.

Instead of answering at once, 'Ola took three or four steps away from the doors. He followed, adding, with a faint glimmering that there was something unusual in her demeanour, "Come, 'Ola, what is it? I want to get back; and I can't see what you can have to say to bring me——"

"There's Tamar in the house," said she, with a certain hardness of look, although her tone was quiet and even gentle.

"Tamar?" he echoed, in a blind sort of way that showed nothing more than a sense of stupefaction.

"Yes. I thought it best not to tell you in the barn." Her father was looking straight at her face, but it was plain to be seen that she had no place in his thoughts. 'Ola added, still speaking in the same tone, "Jinglejoy found her out here, a little while ago looking for you; so I took her into the parlour. . . . She didn't say anything, except that she had just come."

"She said nothing about——"

"She didn't say anything," 'Ola interrupted, without noting that his quick words were belied by that continued

stare of thick amazement. He muttered something that was inaudible to 'Ola, who then said, "I think you had better go and see her and get back as quickly as you can. I'll go back to the barn, while you come."

'Ola moved away. He turned towards the house, saying, "Yes," in a tone that meant nothing. She faced about again, and added, "Don't—I shouldn't—" He paused to look in her direction. "If she wants to go back to Maldon or to Witham to-night, we can soon spare a man to drive her, you know," 'Ola continued. "Don't let her think we can't."

"I'll see to it," said he, in a voice that was a slight improvement on his previous utterance. With that he turned again and moved forward, while she went back to their guests.

From the barn to the house the distance would be about a hundred yards, in traversing which, at an ordinary slow pace, Abe regained something of his natural self. Yet when he entered the parlour, any one who knew him well would have seen at a glance that he was still in a dazed condition. As he closed the door and advanced into the room, trying his utmost to appear to be at ease, there arose from an armchair by the fire a woman who might have been anywhere between twenty-five and thirty-three or four years of age. She was excellent in build, with a compactness that showed strength, to which a gentle sort of fullness lent grace; her height being a little over the medium. Her frock was of darkish grey tweed that fitted her handsomely, but was too devoid of ornament to be attractive. Her hands were ringless, and the only bit of jewellery in sight was a plain, straight, short bar of gold at the high throat of her bodice.

Abe, now suddenly alert as he came within four or five feet of her; noted how her glossy hair—nearly black—was coiled up neatly at the back of her head as in for-

mer days; and that the rather oblong face, with its curious suggestion of being coated with almost imperceptibly fine down, was pretty nearly as full as of old; but that there was a slight touch of grey in the hair at her temples. He put out his hand, knowing as by an instinct, that the expression on her face and that deep something in her penetrating eyes—the size of which was their only fault—were older than her years, older than they were when he last looked at them.

Said he, in a tone that was natural enough, though it had no heart in it, in spite of the accompanying smile, "This is a bit of a surprise, Tamar."

"Is it?" she asked, quite quietly. And a sort of thrill ran through Abe's big frame; but it would be hard to say whether the thrill was one of pleasure, the reverse, or merely remembrance of other scenes in which he had heard that clear, precise tone which was just full enough to leave a pleasant ring behind; but was generally discovered to have a sort of residue of hardness, when one grew accustomed to hear it day-by-day. "Perhaps so," she added, laying a hardly responsive hand in his; the while she gave him one short, sharp, searching eye-to-eye glance, then took in all his details as shortly, and finally fixed her gaze on a hunting scene, over his right shoulder, that she recollected as having hung on the wall of a similarly but much better furnished room in Yorkshire.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, looking at the chair from which she had risen. Without a word she turned her trim back to the shaded lamp and to him and resumed her seat. He sat in a chair by the table, on which the lamp stood, his left elbow on the table, and that hand shading his face from the light. In this position he was looking steadily at her; but she, to whom his moods and temperament had been as an open wicker basket, saw through the constraint which he strove to keep out of

sight. Outwardly he was still Abe Shuttleworth. Inwardly he was a long way from being the man who had kept that huge supper-table agog with humour and interest.

His mind was full of racing thoughts. He wanted to ask her a string of questions, because the situation was one that seemed to demand them of him; but much more dearly he desired to keep clear of the past—of that past which they had left behind in the north. Now and then she looked at him, a few moments at a time, her eyes expressing nothing in particular; then she gazed straight in front of her again—a gaze that had little, indeed, on the surface—with an occasional glance at some object to right or left. Abe's constraint was growing, despite all he could do to keep it down. To break this he said:

"You have come from Maldon to-night?"

"Yes."

"How? You haven't walked?"

"No. I hired a trap to bring me."

"Oh, I suppose I missed it amongst the visitors' turnouts."

"I sent it back." And there was a faint swelling to that slight fulness on each side of her mouth, which physiognomists put down as an indication of animalism.

He nearly blurted out a bigger 'Oh!' Then he noticed, for the first time, that she had taken off her hat and wraps, all of which lay neatly on a side-chair. She had come to stop. Abe caught momentarily at his breath. But it might be only for the night or a few days. Anyhow, it would be wise to wait and see. Then she added, still with no change in her tone from that first "Is it?"

"I left my luggage at the station, because it was too much for the trap."

Aloud he could only say, "Oh!" but to himself there was a more significant, "Was it?"

"Yes. They told me that the carrier would call for it to-morrow."

Abe knew not whether to curse, or to appeal to Providence for a respite. At that instant he could have done either or both. Then his innate sense of justice told him that he had no right to do either. The cloud had burst, and with the bursting he remembered his guests. Rising to his feet, he said,

"Well, I must go back. You will make yourself comfortable?"

"Yes; I think I shall be all right here. You have something going on in the barn?"

"Yes, our harvest-home. 'Ola will come in as soon as she can get away again and show you up to a bedroom." He turned towards the door, adding, "I suppose you're tired with a long journey?"

"No. I have only come from London to-day."

"Well, I must go, before I'm missed too much." And he went—experiencing, as he moved away from the house, in place of the familiar sights and smells of the farmstead, a sense of riotous days, an ever to be deplored deathbed, a wronged wife to whom he had given all a young man's love for her very beauty, a court of law, a prison, shame, a threatened financial crash, and what his conscience told him was no more nor less than flight. As he re-entered the glare and din, 'Ola shot an interrogative glance at him, and read futility in his expression. He gave her a look that said enough for the moment, passed Amariah and Tom Wade in whispered consultation between the table and the curtain, and was clearly conscious only of a loud hubbub of tongues and some louder calls for a song. Then the elder Cawpkin saw him and muttered to Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, who sat on his right, "Here's the man that wants the parish." But, as his only reply was a dignified stare, he dimly feared that his dislike had led him into an indiscretion. At this

point, unnoticed by the others, Wade made a signal to Dick Warriner, who at once rapped the table with his knuckles and called out,

"Order, order! Tom Wade will sing, if it please you!"

To this there appeared to be no objection. So, as Amariah slipped between the curtains and out of the barn, Wade went to the dray and climbed on to it, where he stood, awaiting silence. As the verbal tumult died away, Lucian asked 'Ola if she intended to play for the singer. With her mind on other things, she shook her head. Someone further up the table cried, "Go in, Tom! —give us a fair roarer!" Abe, now in his seat again and beginning afresh to realise his position, called for silence. With a new kindness in his voice, Lucian suggested to 'Ola that if no one else was to play, he would. She showing a little of her old interest as she looked at him, said, "Yes, certainly." And he, too, went to the dray—thinking that for her sake he could become a plough-boy. After a few minutes spent in Wade giving the tune in an undertone to Lucian, so that the latter could "vamp" for him, because he had no music, the young wheel-wright led off with, to the air of "Teddy O'Neil":

"The storm it was brewin';
The frost it was bakin';
The snow like a sheet covered cabin an' sty,
When Barney flew over the hills to his darlin'
And tapped at the window w'ere Katie did lie.
'Ah, Katie,' ses he, 'are ye sleepin' or wakin'?
For it's a bitter cold night and me coat it is thin.
Sure the storm it is brewin',
The frost it is bakin'—
Arrah, Katie, mavoureen, you must let me in.

'Sure the storm it is brewin',
The frost it is bakin',—
Arrah, Katie, mavoureen, you must let me in.'"

While Lucian "vamped" an interlude, a small door was opened high above the bunting, showing an opening that had been used in former times for unloading carts into a hayloft which was no longer in existence. This action was unseen by any of the company, and Amariah's pretty face and full bust, in that glaring orange-coloured and black bodice of hers, nearly filled the aperture. Then, when Lucian gave the signal note to Wade, as he thought, her strong, entirely untrained but not unpleasant voice gave out:

"'Ah, Barney,' says she."

(Here every head at the table was quickly jerked up, and around where needed to ascertain whence the voice came; and, while all alike enjoyed the staginess of the affair, most of her listeners looked on it as an effort to regain the favour that she had lost by her joke on Jinglejoy.)

"And she spoke through the window,
'How can you be taking me out of me bed?
For to come at this time is a sin and a shame, too;
It's whisky, not love, that's got into your head.
For what has a poor girl but her name to defend her?
No, Barney, mavoureen, I won't let you in.'"

(Some murmuring and a slight commotion was now noticeable near the head of the board. Amariah continued with the refrain.)

"For what has a poor girl but her name to defend her?
No, Barney, mav——"

The remainder of those high notes, with which Amariah (much to the satisfaction of herself and five or six others) had already made the roof ring and was now bringing out even louder and better, and did not sound at all badly away up there, were suddenly interrupted by a respectable sort of tumult at the upper half of the

table. But above the hubbub of this rising tide, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, who had stretched her large figure to its full height, could be heard saying,

"It's a shame! It's a shame, Mr. Shuttleworth. It's a right-down shame, Mr. Chapman!" Abe, dragging his thoughts away from that more unpleasant episode in the house, looked up in wonderment at the interruption. Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling caught his eye and added strenuously, "It's an insult to every respectable person here, and especially us ladies! That song is a naughty song! It's a wicked song! It isn't fit to be sung in respectable company! Look what he's gone to the house for!"

This last remark of hers clenched the argument. Almost the moment it had left her lips, a look from the Rector and a glance at the faces of those around her told her clearly enough that she had said one thing too many. Feeling an embarrassment that was not common to her, she sat down so hurriedly as to bring the whole of her weight on the yielding arm of Cawpkin, he having put his hand on her chair and leaned on it while talking to Jinglejoy. He thanked her "for not breaking his arm," then found solace in the fact that he could still carry the hand to his mouth. By this time the hearty applause of the lower half of the table had dwindled down to a few phrases of encouragement, and those who sat there were gazing at the higher half in open-eyed bewilderment. At the upper end the men, not one of whom had previously seen anything amiss in the song, because they had paid but little attention to it, now began to see that they must either join the issue on the side of propriety, or suffer something in the nature of ostracism. Miss Scopes was audibly murmuring to no one in particular, that it was "hardly a harvest-home song; but, then, Amariah always was a bit flighty." While Pinch Jellie, glancing up at the surprised face of the girl, as she looked down at the commotion, said to himself, "Ah, the devil has lit

you to bed, my girl, many a time before now; and it seems to me that he'll do it many a time again." Mrs. Briggs and the school-mistress were ably seconding Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling's complaint; and Mrs. Moriety pathetically reminded any one who cared to hear her that "you have to put up with things at such times, or be awkward with people." But the thrice-made widow was a publican, and that calling had possibly not left her judgment quite so strict as was that of some of the ladies around her. At least they made allowances in this direction, and continued their expostulations—much to the cross-eyed surprise and some anger of Jonas; who, although he usually looked on all his daughter's doings from a strictly business point of view, swore to himself that "he would be hung for a wite-livered nigger if he could see what the hangment they were naggin' about. The girl had sung well—miles better 'an any of them mothers'-meetin' busybodies could—so w'y couldn't they let her along." In the meantime, Lucian hung his head over the keyboard of the piano, wishing to goodness that he could laugh, and wondering how the affair would end; at the front edge of the dray Wade stood, in deep surprise that he had not previously seen what was likely to happen (as Warriner was), and not knowing what to do next; Jinglejoy, now severely neutral, toyed with a fork as he looked at it with his left eye and at his neighbour's plate with his right; and at the bottom of the table 'Ola sat bolt upright, in some fear that the whole thing was to be publicly as well as privately spoilt, wishing that it was all over—or, better still, never had come about—and half-wondering what all the fuss concerned, for she had not been listening to the song. As for Kester: his inclination was to "rap out" at Wade as the prime mover in the matter. In fact he arose, blurted out a few words, then sat down suddenly.

Thus it was when Abe, after a short whispering with

the Rector and Mr. Varley, stood up, rapped the table with the first thing that was handy, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, there are some friends here that object to the song we have heard—or what we've heard of it; because I don't know whether it's finished or not. To tell you the real truth, I wasn't listening to it. Well, we all have our likes and dislikes [Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling muttered something to the effect that this was 'not a case of likes and dislikes, but of what was proper']; and that, of course, is as it should be, or look what a rumpus the world would be in by us all being after the same thing. But, as one doesn't like what another does, we all have to consider each other at times like these. And although I'm ready to say—nay, I'll go further than that; for I will say that neither Amariah nor Tom Wade had any thought of giving any offence to any one. Still in consideration of the feelings of others, I'm bound to ask them not to sing any more of that song. Perhaps they'll sing us another, either now or later on."

And here he sat down; as Amariah came in slowly and went to her seat, crying angrily and seeing no wrong in what she had done; which had all been secretly arranged on the previous day and at the instance of Wade. But, then, as Jinglejoy afterwards said when discussing the matter with Jonas, "Sum dogs can stayle (steal) half shoulders o' mutton an' get inta noa soart o' trouble." During this it might have been seen that Lucian exchanged a few words with Wade, then the latter left the dray; whereon Lucian played an introductory and, without any further preliminary, filled the place with that fine baritone voice of his and:

"O I am the first of the whole world's tools,*
For I came when the world began;

* The music rights of this song are the property of Messrs. Ascherberg & Hopwood & Crew.

And my primitive form has withstood the storm
  Of that change which has touched even man;
The eldest and humblest, the first and last,
  Poor aristocrat of the soil;
With a pedigree longer than kings can boast—
  And the end of all human toil."

As Lucian played his short interlude, there was hardly a face at the table that did not turn towards the dray: and scarcely a word was said.

"I call to you, call to you: Leave your books,
  And come back to the primal source;
With arms bared and brown, now so whitened in town,
  I will make you a man of force.
And I call to the trader, the artizan,
  To the clerk and the workshop 'hand,'
Give a space of your time, for your body and soul,
  To your patches of household land."

'Ola had been almost one of the first to look at the singer; now she was glad to see that her father had turned interestedly in his direction. A new atmosphere seemed to have enveloped things generally.

"O I sing not a song of the workshop dense,
  With its foul and its stagnant air;
But I chant you a strain of sweet herb and grain,
  Of the bloom that is soft and fair.
I bring you no pallid nor sunken cheeks,
  Nor a cough and a premature death:
I give you the strength and the glorious wealth
  That come on the fresh wind's breath."

In this brief interval, under cover of the applause, in which Abe joined, Madoc arose, crept down to Lucian's chair and did his clumsy best to draw 'Ola into conversation—till she quietened him by ruthlessly whispering, not too low for anyone else to hear, that it was very bad manners to talk during the singing. Here Lucian again

silenced them all, for the whole of his heart was in his singing.

"Then here's to the heart that delights in me,
  To the hand with the grip of man;
To the honest thought, not of custom wrought
  That this life is a trading-span.
I call to you: Come to the cool brown earth,
  To the work that is health and gain,
To the scent of soil that is worth your moil—
  To a pleasure that brings no pain."

So far Lucian had forgotten that he was singing to those who loved a chorus—to those, in fact, with whom the best chorus meant the best song. So he now made a refrain of the last two lines, and was so surprised to find how readily and heartily the usually unresponsive Essexmen took it up that he repeated it for their pleasure—he forgetting that sprinkling of more easily moved men and women from other counties. It was owing to this repetition that his listeners thought the song was finished, and sent out such a roar of applause and shouts of "Encore" that his interlude was completely drowned. Now it was, also, that Madoc essayed another futile attempt to make 'Ola talk, and that Pinch Jellie tried on the schoolmistress his first piece of sarcastic wit that did not take immediate effect. Then, putting all his power into the last stanza, Lucian seemed in a way to fling at them:

"O a million healths and a thousand wealths,
  And the wide earth spread at his feet,
To the man who finds, as through life he winds,
  That my haft to his hand is sweet.
For the man who can say in his inmost heart,
  As he delves in the cool moist earth,
That my handle he loves, as a woman loves,
  Has a treasure that 's greater than birth!"

And again he played up to their weakness with a refrain which was bellowed to the black echoing roof, as

if their lives depended on the volume of the noise, though not on the correct rendering. In fact, when Lucian came off the dray, those who sat down the table were still battling with their chorus, while the majority at the upper end of the board appeared to be doing their best to smother everything else in applause. In the midst of this gargantuan tug of tongues Abe arose and intercepted the singer to say,

"I should be glad if you would tell me the name of that song, Mr. Kingdom."

"Well, it's just called 'The Song of the Spade,'" he answered, in a certain modesty of manner which Abe saw but did not understand.

"I should like to know where I could get a copy."

"I guess I'll just have to make you one, then—because the song isn't on sale yet."

"What?" asked the astonished Abe. "Do you mean to say?—Is it really your song?" Lucian smiled and nodded his head. "Give me your hand, then." Their hands met, Lucian's smaller one being lost in the big and fervid grip of Abe's. "I don't know about the nation altogether; but the man who can write a song like that has gone about as far 'back to Nature' as any man needs to; and that's what we want here now-a-days.—If we can only get enough of it soon enough we shall save Britain, that's my opinion; and probably save her from a worse drop than the Romans had."

Thus talking—and closely watched all the time by 'Ola, while Madoc wondered what she was staring at—they turned back to the table; where Lucian left Abe, as soon as it was polity to do so, and went back to his place. On arriving at the back of the chair, in which Madoc was still sitting, Lucian was rather at a loss how to proceed. Casually he put his hand on the top of the chair-back. Someone going past at the moment tripped in the straw, and was like to have taken Lucian with him. To save

himself the other clung to his hold on the chair, the result being that Madoc looked around to see what had happened. For a moment he thought that Lucian had tried to jerk the chair from under him; then, observing the sprawling one regaining his feet and taking a fresh realisation of his own dignity—for Madoc, as the youngest farmer in the district, thought "no small beer of himself"—he gave a sort of nod of recognition to Lucian, and was turning again to the table, when Lucian said,

"I beg your pardon, but I think you have my chair."

"Oh, that's all right, Mister. Any seat is anybody's here now—you take mine," was the off-hand answer that nearly took Lucian's breath away.

"But——" he began, then stopped, seeing at once that ordinary methods would be useless here. Over Madoc's shoulder he caught a side glint of 'Ola's eye, and realised that there was the suspicion of a smile playing about it; as, in truth, there was; for, girl-like, she was tickled at the situation—she knowing that the native, in his dull, dogged sort of way, was blindly jealous of the stranger.

With some increasing sense of his embarrassing position Lucian was hurriedly casting about for a satisfactory means of getting the better of the yokel's bearishness. At the moment he would have given much to have been able to turn the tables on Madoc, particularly if the turning had been of an unusually neat and piquant kind. But his inventive faculties would not rise to the occasion. He could see no way out of the impassè, except by surrendering to this crude and bluntly inglorious defeat. Who Madoc really was he had no idea, beyond what the other's clothes, manners and many a previous long look at 'Ola led him to conjecture. As to what 'Ola thought of the affair he had no means of ascertaining only in so far as that misleading touch of a smile went—misleading because, however amused she might be at his discomfiture, he was thoroughly assured that she had enjoyed his com-

pany up to her being called out by Jinglejoy. Thus flew the thoughts through his mind as he glanced around in search of inspiration, slowly drew his hand from the chair-back and moved away—feeling smaller than he had done for some time, rather sore to boot, and vaguely thinking what a farce the whole hubbub was. As he went along the foot of the table and turned up its side—of course in the opposite direction to Madoc's chair—he could almost have flung stones at those dangling lamps, some of which had flickered out by this time. Incidentally he pictured what a stampede there would be if he could suddenly put all the lights out—the consternation at the upper end of the table, and the rough horse-play, the forced embraces and the welcome though seemingly resented kisses at the lower end.

It was here that a new friend came to his rescue. Amariah, who had been watching this side-play and whose sympathies were obviously with Lucian, hurried to the back of Madoc's chair and whispered in his ear, "Mr. Cawpkin, your uncle wants to speak to you, private."

Madoc looked in his relative's direction, saw that he was deep in conversation with his further neighbour—Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, the woman of undiscriminating charity of purse though not of tongue—recollected certain pressing monetary affairs, which were general in the family; and, afraid to lose this rather painful pleasure for that possible gain, also fearful of throwing that away for this, he replied,

"All right, tell him I'll come soon."

"He said he wanted you *at once,* and it was very important." She was thinking that if he should suddenly catch the eye of his uncle, her plans would be upset; therefore she must have him out of the chair before the elder Cawpkin looked their way, or Lucian wandered too far off. "He said you was to come now, or you might be sorry."

This clenched the matter—his uncle must be getting

Mrs. H.-T. to lend money to them, which would enable them to hold up their heads with this annoyingly successful and long-tongued man from the shires. Saying to 'Ola, just as if his absence would be otherwise resented, that he would be back in a few minutes, he eased his lanky frame out of the chair and went towards his uncle—with Amariah in his rear, she glancing back and furtively beckoning Lucian to the empty seat. It was at this moment, as Lucian hurried to his rightful place, that 'Ola looked around and picked up the plot from the ends of thread which she then saw hanging about. In spite of herself she could not avoid laughing at the situation. It was this laugh that brought Lucian back all his optimism.

As for Madoc: when he arrived at his uncle's side and learnt that Amariah had made him the butt of a joke—the true reason of which even his slow wits got a glimmering as he saw Lucian sitting and smiling by 'Ola—he returned to that saucy young person, let her know that he saw what she had done; and, smiling while he would have smacked if he dared, he pinched her under the arm, in supposed playfulness, till she called out a second time at the pain and made a vindictive but ineffectual effort to get even with him. Then he returned, by the head of the table, to his own seat, vowing that he would square up the score before the evening was out.

As Madoc went down the other side of the board, Abe arose, called for order and announced that "Mr. Pinch Jellie would propose the health of the ladies." Abe had conferred this favour on "the Lady" as a sort of balm for past wounds, and it was in the back of his mind to make some humour out of the fact of this toast being in such excellent hands; but even his robustness could not yet overcome the depressing influence of that unexpected presence in the house. So he contented himself with saying that as most of the puddings had now been to the table, those who wished to continue eating could do so;

meanwhile, "church-wardens" and tobacco would be served out, and, if the ladies did not mind, the men could smoke—but they were to be careful of their matches.

Accordingly pipes were lit, putting the table in a thin cloud of smoke. Glasses were replenished, to the accompaniment of several unofficial calls of "Order, order for Mr. P. J.!"—this being the local appellation by which the retired grocer was generally spoken of in his absence, a fact that increased his sarcasm at times; because it was a part of his life that he could not obtain, especially from the lower orders, the respect which is usually given to size, authority and real worth. "Mr. P. J." always reminded him that he had neither of these characteristics. Therefore he arose at a mental disadvantage, tapped the side of that beloved Jacobean goblet of his, which he took with him to every kind of feasting, and always sounded when he wanted attention—mostly because of its "distinctiveness" and his delight in hearing its long-sustained clear note. With his mind partially on Abe, he was opening with some rather splenetic and retaliatory though smiling, remarks, which—in the words of Lucian to 'Ola—he would have "to sugar down" presently; when, between Madoc and Mrs. Briggs, there suddenly appeared smoke that caused screams and a stampede from that locality.

Then up shot flames, and the table was deserted as by a sweep of one's hand. Within a moment the place was full of men's more or less ordered turmoil and of women's horror and consternation. The situation needed no long explanation. Someone had thoughtlessly thrown a lighted match on the straw, which was fortunately not very thick. Of much more importance was the fact that Mrs. Briggs's clothes were on fire. Three of the men, including the elder Cawpkin and Warriner, who had momentarily "lost their heads" and were forgetful of the burning candles, made to push the huge table over so as to clear it of the

flaming straw. But others with Abe, Lucian and Jonas at their head were just in time to stop them. While some of them tried to trample out the fire, half-smothered in their almost useless efforts, others ran for pails of water. Under Lucian's directions the table-cloths were whipped up on to the board; the candles were snuffed out, and with everything on them, jumbled into heaps, to the breaking of plates and glasses and the scratching of silver-ware, the cloths were picked up by their corners and hurried into safety. It was during this that a neat, self-possessed figure passed inside the curtain, under which most of the women were hurrying excitedly. This was Tamar, who had heard the screams. With one rapid glance at the scene, she saw, in particular, Mrs. Briggs on the further side of the barn, trying to stop the burning in her skirts, with the unmethodical help of three or four others, 'Ola amongst them. Quickly she tore down the heavy curtain, crossed to the group, forced Mrs. Briggs flat on the floor —in spite of that square-built person's efforts to the contrary—put the others to hold her there, and smothered out the fire with the curtain. The whole thing was done in a couple of minutes. Then Tamar promptly, and still without a scrap of fuss, sent 'Ola indoors for such applicable medicaments as the house possessed; and, in the next breath, she hurried off the nearest man for a doctor.

By the time Tamar—behind a screen formed by two women holding the curtain up—had dressed the wounds (happily not severe) of the sufferer, to the accompaniment of that practical body's reiterated accusation that Madoc had caused all the trouble, the fire was quite overcome. A sort of peace had been restored generally; but the end of the supper lay in ruins, and further conviviality was out of the question.

This was seen at a glance by Abe; who, having lost heart in the whole affair—as the presence of Tamar reminded him—and counting that the damage was not much

greater than what would still have been consumed, suggested to the Rector that they should wind the matter up there and then. Hence, in place of "He's a jolly good fellow," "Auld Lang Syne" and "God Save the King," with which some of the feasters had thought to have boisterously finished the supper, a quiet vote of thanks was passed to Abe and 'Ola. The plate and other valuables were then carried into the house. Mrs. Briggs was borne home, in the curtain, the doctor by her side, and in her ears many regrets and condolences which did not stop her blunt opinions of Madoc. The guests dispersed quietly, leaving the farmstead peaceful under the autumn stars; though there was within a coldness and a constraint which prevented a like peace being there. But although the feasters went away in quietude, they did not pass through the village in that manner. Too much ale had been drank for all the tongues to be satisfied with ordinary talk. While the more respectable of the merrymakers drove or otherwise hurried home, the majority took their time, some with uncertain gait and untouched by the sharp night that echoed to many a snatch of song roared out regardless of music, some of them being old natives of the soil, others new and general and not a few of which would have shocked the ears of Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling. Born and reared in and permeated with the hardships and privations of their class and county—in summer long, long days of labour, in winter short hours of bitter toil and dreary hours of soul and mind-dwarfing darkness, and ever over-shadowed by the chilling "poorhouse on the hill"—was it not for them to be happy when they could? As for their mode of expression in this—Were they or their betters the more to blame? In a county where every native proverb is a biting fling at the people or the soil it is difficult to say where lies the cause of so much that is narrow, slow, stubborn and little hearted. Still, all was not gloom to these poor

workers; they had their times of ease and mirth, and this was a red-letter one.

Late that night, while Tamar went doggedly to sleep, in a quietude that refused to visit 'Ola's tumbled pillow, Abe—whose custom was to spend his last hour or so before going to bed in reading and smoking in the study—read: "Infinite are the ways of fate, 'neath which there ever runs a tale we may not read; yet is so plain a prophecy at time, at other times an open parallel, that we are dense, indeed, who do not see the teaching meant for us." At that he abruptly, mechanically closed the book; and sat thinking, staring straight before him, motionless but for the puffing at his pipe.

LITTLE GLEANINGS

LITTLE GLEANINGS

"I AM sure you are wrong, Abe.—You revoked on that three of spades.—Look," said Tamar, imperturbably, as she reached across, took his cards and proceeded to show where he had made the fault. A fatal habit of superior correction, inherent, yet developed since the old days, was now strong upon her; it was not exactly meant as such; but it was there, seen by two at the table and painfully felt by the third. Meanwhile, with an expression that was ludicrous on a face so seemingly strong, and his tawny hair appearing to have lost, in the shaded lamplight, the warlike hue that had marked it in the glare of the harvest-supper table, Abe sat still and stiff, gazing at 'Ola, as if asking her pathetically what a man could do in such circumstances. On her side, "she could have swept the cards into the fire, and have told Tamar there and then to take her chilly presence where it would be more welcome"—that is if Lucian had not been there. But, seeing her father's look and not being short in the sense of humour, she failed to keep a quite straight face. The result was that he shifted his gaze to the young American—who, under a guise of indifference, was making careful notes—and smiled in the manner of one who was doubtful as to whether he ought to or not. Then the break came.

Abe pushed his chair back and arose, saying, with a forced semblance of his usual frame of mind, "I'll just slip out and see how Turpin is, while you find it."

"But wait,—I shall have it in a moment. The horse can wait a little longer," was Tamar's placid rejoinder.

"No, Tamar, when a horse is bad on my premises it

can't wait for anything," and with that reminiscence of his old self out went Abe, leaving her to hide—as she always did anything of the sort—her secret anger at what was defeat to her; while Lucian heard, noted, seemed not to be interested; and 'Ola smiled from her heart to her face, apparently at nothing in particular, in reality at seeing that her father could still "kick" (as he had done on two other occasions during the fifteen days that had intervened since the harvest-home) against the growing, icy tyranny of their "visitor." Then she suddenly remembered Lucian—her partner, as Tamar had contrived—and shot at him a quick, apprehensive look of interrogation. But the young man was wilfully "seeing nothing"; and, to assist him in continuing to do so, he asked to be excused, then went to the fire and lit a cigarette, because the matchbox on the table was empty.

In the meantime Abe took a look at Turpin, saw that the horse would be all right for a couple of hours; then he swung his long strides down to the "saltings" and back, finding his pent-up feelings relieved and his mind again in some degree of peace by a sort of spiritual contact with the open sky and the green and brown earth. Had Lucian not been his guest on this occasion, he would have gone much further. As it was he cursed himself that a guilty passion had put him into such a position, walked the wild impotence off and returned to the house.

"There," said Tamar, some two or three minutes after Abe had gone out, "now they are ready for him to see when he comes in. If you don't mind, Mr. Kingdom"—fixing her steady eyes momentarily on him—"I will just see how Mercy is getting on with the supper; then we shall all be ready together again."

"You needn't trouble," said 'Ola, with a quietness that belied a certain resentment at this—not the only—interference in her housekeeping. By this time Tamar was

halfway to the door. "Mercy always gets on best when she is left alone," 'Ola added; but Tamar left the room without another word. Whether Mercy could do better by herself than with help was of no moment to Tamar, who was bent on going to the kitchen as the most plausible excuse under the circumstances, and went there.

The silence was becoming awkward; and the evening had not been so pleasant to Lucian as it might have been —certainly not so enjoyable as Abe had intended it should be, when he casually met the young man in the afternoon, learnt that the latter was going away on the morrow "for good," and asked him down to the house that evening for a little quiet sociability; which, with the reverse of any marring intention, Tamar had come very near spoiling by her placid dogmatising whenever Abe—who was not a good card-player—had made a mistake or had tried to talk politics or farming with his guest.

"I don't think that Mr. Shuttleworth is quite well tonight," Lucian ventured, with his back to the fire and watching 'Ola, as she shuffled and dealt the cards in a pastime effort to see what "hands" she could get.

"Oh, he is all right," she replied, in a tone that would have deceived an older head than his.

"It doesn't appear so, Miss Shuttleworth. His tone was slightly deferential but there was decision in it all the same; and, although 'Ola had not noticed the fact, there was rather less twang—not that he had a deal of it at any time—and fewer of those "Amuricanisms" in his words when he addressed her than there were when he talked to others.

"Well—Just look what a hand! Nine hearts, two aces and a king and a queen! If one could only get hands like that when playing!" And she held up the cards for him to see them.

"Yes, it's what one might call a hearty hand," he remarked, quietly.

"Don't make puns. They are only a cheap form of wit."

"But Tom Hood lived on them, just, and Shakespeare made them." She was silently studying the cards. . . . "Anyhow, I was thinking of your father."

"Oh, his health is all right."

"But I guess his mind is not so to-night. He is worried some. . . . Do you know, Miss Shuttleworth, he makes me think sometimes that he's had a lot of trouble, and when I think that I just feel a big load of pity for him—he's such a fine man."

"He has, and he will have more yet," said 'Ola, deliberately and almost involuntarily, her thoughts flying off at a tangent to Tamar.

"I hope not; but he's just sure of a new sorrow when you leave him."

"When I leave him?" and she turned far enough to look at Lucian.

"Yes," he answered, still in the same easy, matter-of-fact manner. "If it isn't too delicate a subject, I guess you will be marrying some day."

"Oh, well, yes, I suppose I shall, the same as other girls," was her rather confused reply, as she turned again to the cards on the table; then added in a lower tone, so serious as to show a perceptible touch of sorrow, "But I shall never leave my father more than a mile or two for any man,—not while . . . he is alive." It was on her tongue to have said "not while Tamar is alive."

"Then you will marry a farmer, I guess?"

"I expect so," was the seemingly disinterested rejoinder.

He could not avoid saying, with just a suspicion of resentment, "One of these heavy-footed hayseeds, I suppose."

"One of these what?" and she faced him again, as

if to contrast her gracious beauty with the incongruity of such an idea.

"I mean a dull man who thinks of nothing but haytime and cattle and seedtime and harvest," he explained, feeling a passing bitterness which he now took care to keep under.

"All farmers are not dull—*hayseeds*, as you call them," said she, half-defiantly, and took up the cards again. . . . "And even if they were," her words came with such steadiness and decision as rather to startle Lucian, "I would sooner take of them, or die an old maid, than go away from father.—But whatever are we talking about! Here," and down went the cards in a manner that sent some of them on to the floor, as up she sprang and went with sudden gaiety to the piano, adding, in a way that seemed to throw out a challenge, "come and sing something, and I will try to play for you."

Obedient to the call he went; and presently his full rich tones were giving satisfaction in the kitchen; they even reached Abe, in the stables across the yard, and called him back, in an easier frame of mind.

BOOK II

THE BARE BROWN EARTH

"Woa, mare! What's the matter with you?—Can't you be quiet! Or have you got the hump, like the rest of us?" She abruptly swung her rear half across the stall, jamming him between it and the partition. "D——!" 'Ola appeared in the stable doorway, with an atmosphere about her that was curiously suggestive of quiet anger.

"Perhaps she has," said 'Ola, in a tone that was like her manner.

Abe was not hurt; but he resented the mare's action so much that, unusually humane though he was to dumb creatures generally, he put his big shoulder against her haunch and sent her clattering back to the other side of the stall. Then, the moment there was room for the swing of his arm, he brought a strap-end down on her in a way that caused her heels to go flying viciously towards the harness-pegs.

"I shouldn't take it out of her," 'Ola remarked, as before.

Her father continued his work of harnessing the mare. To 'Ola he made no reply. Her reproof had given him a set-back which he knew he deserved; and now, as she stood there in the doorway with her hands in the pockets of her dairy-apron, some twenty feet to his right-front, and having the dark-green holly hedge of the garden as a strongly outlining background, he felt that there was a certain accusation in her very attitude. More still, he knew he was to blame.

It was one of those dull, cold, raw mornings which put most persons, particularly the highly strung, out of humour with themselves and the world at large. Break-

fast had been characterised by a frigidity that had become painfully common at meals during the past ten days at the Hall Farm. It was, in fact, an oppressive coldness that had grown as the days had gone by, especially at breakfasts; for, coming to it as we do, with an accumulation of thought and feeling got of the night and sleep the morning meal has about it a sort of psychology that no other meal has. It was direct from this almost silent table that Abe had emerged—to stride rapidly from cow-house to piggery, barn and garden, then to wagon-sheds and stables, unwontedly hurrying every man and boy to work; even so far as to stop some tasks and start new ones, which he would not have done in calmer moments, and to make all his "hands" wonder what on earth had happened to him. In the last-named place he had found a youth giving the mare a rub down, in preparation for him to drive to Maldon market; and although it was still half an hour to the time when the dog-cart was to be ready, he had sent the youngster painfully to another piece of work, and had himself taken on the harnessing. Now he passed the reins through the rings in the hames and began to buckle them to the bit, wishing that he had not made a resolution never to keep another saddle-horse of his weight; for a devil's gallop over hedge and ditch was just what his heart was hungering after. Such an exhilaration would have driven those foul humours from his mind and made him fit to fling out his big laughs again. But, ardent foxhunter that he had been, he was now set strongly against it, and spoke of it as "the boys' cruelty of a lot of silly men and women—not the pastime of sensible persons and certainly not sport."

"You are not much help in the matter, anyway," said he, not altogether unkindly, as he passed out of the stall. "Come over, mare!"

These were their first words on the subject since two days previous to this; yet both father and daughter knew

quite well what it was that agitated each other's mind so unpleasantly.

"I don't see what I can do in it, except to let her see that I don't want her; and I do as much of that as——" 'Ola paused in her matter-of-fact statement. "As much as my conscience will let me," was in her mind, but she did not wish to put the matter in those words quite. She was about to add something anent her "sense of justice," when she saw that such a phrase would both strengthen Tamar's position and probably weaken her father's mind on the subject, even if it did not annoy him as an indirect accusation. Then 'Ola broke the awkward silence by saying, "At anyrate, I think she has an awful lot of self-possession to come down here like this."

"Did you ever know Tamar to be anything else than self-possessed?" He was really thinking of this newly developed phase of hers—new to him—a kind of creeping, unflinching and superior mastership that galled him keenly whenever it appeared, and was directed at him only—as he saw.

"No; and that isn't what I meant quite."

"It beats me how she found us out so nicely," he remarked, gloomily.

"It doesn't me."

"Why?"

"Because of you getting your name into the newspapers so much about your ideas of farmers amalgamating and that." Abe, remembering that the mare was rather fresh, took a last look at the buckles generally. He saw the truth of what 'Ola said, and was mute. "If you had been content to do nothing but work the farm as you said you would when we came here, she would never have found us, perhaps," 'Ola concluded, not with any condemnation in her tone; she never accused her father in this matter, although her criticism of him in other affairs was not always so kindly. For there were times

when she thought he might be more to blame than Tamar was concerning that terrible scandal, the cause of which had brought Tamar back to them.

"Perhaps," he echoed, dubiously. . . .

"I don't know that I should so much mind her being here if she wasn't so fearfully cold and silent. She makes everyone in the place miserable,—because she *will* help where there is anything to do. . . . She was quiet enough before, though she wasn't gloomy; but now — . . . However, she is here; and something must be said to her.—Mustn't there?"

"I suppose so."

"About going?"

"I suppose so."

"Because if the neighbours got to hear everything, you would be scandalised from here to Withem."

"I don't see how they can get to hear anything of . . . those things."

"Well, things do get out in a strange way."

"Tamar won't——" Suddenly he changed his tone and manner with the interruption, "Is there anybody about out there?"

'Ola glanced to right and left outside the stables, then answered, "No."

Abe knew there was no one except himself inside, so he resumed, "*I* shan't; it isn't likely that you will——"

"I should think it isn't!—For where should I be, with her living in the house and people knowing all about it?——"

"And I'll wager my last farthing that Jingle' won't." . . . He turned again to the mare's head.

"Well, she has to be told,—if only because . . ."

"Because what?"

"That promise you made to mother." This was not said in a desire to remind him of the vow to his dying wife, that he would not marry again, but as one of the

strongest conditions in the situation. Without thinking that the vow was quite a right thing to have made, 'Ola believed that this was one of the things from which her father would never depart. She knew that she had no evidence on which to blame either of the guilty ones more than the other. In her own mind she readily admitted that Tamar had much right to look to her father for all that a woman looks to a man for; but she wanted peace in the house, and she could not see how it was to be regained under present circumstances. Half-forgetfully he girded up the belly-band another hole —wincing as he did so, not at the vow, but at what he had done towards making that unbalanced woman take her own life, to whom Tamar had acted as a companion.

"Yes, that's the strong horse in the team," he said quietly, bringing the mare's head around with him.

"Then, why not get it said and done with?" 'Ola asked, still in the doorway, as though he did not want to go through with the mare.

Abe paused, with a restraining hand on the bridle, his eyes fastened on 'Ola's face and his expression seeming to say: "That's a new thought. Why not?"

"It's awkward, I know," she added, feeling that at last she had arrived at the cause of her being there. "You have to do it, and the longer you put it off the worse it will be."

For the space of half a minute or so father and daughter looked steadily into each other's eyes. Then he wheeled the mare around again, hitched a piece of rope in the headstall-ring, to one of the bit-rings—as if he would be back speedily, and walked out of the stable, in the manner of one with a heavy matter on his mind. When her father had passed her, 'Ola intuitively turned back to the mare. She knew her father, and the task before him; so she took off the bridle, put the headstall

in its place, then went to her work with Mercy in the kitchen, her mind being too full of her father and Tamar for her to notice that rawness in the air.

When Abe returned from Tamar to the harvest-supper it was with the feeling of one who had suddenly been found undeniably guilty of a crime, and simultaneously of having tried to shirk its penalty; a condition of things that, to a man of his kind, was both numbing and galling. And now, at the dictating of that vow to the dead one, the desire of his daughter, his interest in her social welfare and for the general peace of his household, he—not forgetting the hated infanticide horror he always felt at any vivid recollection of his wife's death, and vainly endeavouring the while to blunt that fine sense of justice which ever actuated him in quiet times—was going back to the judge (whose partial guilt in their wrong-doing and singleness in her own subsequent crime did not rob her of the pitifulness that belongs to a victim) to tell her to take herself off the bench of his presence. Still, his mind was not greatly on the rack as he slowly wound his way back to the house; the simple reason being that at the moment he was too dazed, in a way, at this sudden phase of the situation and in wondering how he would work it to a clear issue.

From the very morning after her arrival Tamar had taken an intermediate place in the household, between 'Ola and Mercy. The way in which this had come about was curiously, strikingly indicative of the woman. It was an induction in which there had hardly been a word of ceremony. With an amount of naturalness that would have been astounding to one who did not know her—especially in view of the past—in the manner of one just returned from a holiday, glad to be home and at work again, she had cleared the parlour breakfast-table, carrying the tray after 'Ola into the kitchen. There, to the wordless surprise of 'Ola—who lacked sufficient hardness

to say nay, under the circumstances—while the latter had enumerated the morning's duties to Mercy, Tamar had put in a quiet "I will do that," or "I can see to that." In each case the selected task had been of a less menial kind than what was left to Mercy, and was carried through with that deftness and the dispatch which were inherent to her nature. So the routine had continued up to the present. The fact was that within her sharply defined compass she had an unusual amount of physical adaptability. Whilst she could easily conform to a routine (probably owing to that period in prison) and be quietly tactful with those to whom she was not closely allied, it was her misfortune that she had no real mental adaptability, particularly to the person with whom she should have been most in accord—possibly because in that hardset mind of hers there was an immovable idea that this person should conform to her. During the time she had spent as companion to Abe's wife, that guilty passion between them had been enough to hide this "incompatibility of temper;" besides, the presence of the wife had then kept Tamar so much more in the background than anything could keep her now. Town-bred and educated, she had, in the farmstead that had largely been brought to ruin by her presence, very soon become as much at home as if born to the smell of cow-sheds, piggeries, meadowland and brown earth. It was by this trait, and her being the very antithesis of his wife, that she had won so much on Abe in those spendthrift days up north; and it was by it that she now seemed to be so completely a part of the Essex household, that some of its dependents were beginning to ask each other who and what she was. Two or three of them had gone so far as to put this question to Jinglejoy; who had merely squinted harder than usual and replied, "Ax th' maister or Miss 'Ola; it's their business." Thus the idea had become common that Tamar was a distant relative

of the family, and was at the Hall Farm on a visit of indefinite length.

So it was that Abe directed his steps to the kitchen, where he found what he sought; Mercy being upstairs at the time. "Are you very busy just now, Tamar?" he inquired, quite ordinarily to all appearances.

She turned to him casually, saying, "No." But, then, her manner was mostly casual when she was interrupted in anything; until one looked at her eyes, in which there was always a sort of latent alertness.

"I wish you would come with me into the study, then, for a few minutes; I——" He was on the point of adding "should like to have a few words with you;" but he checked the expression, lest it should carry with it any sense of severity. By this time he was half-across the kitchen-floor, leading the way to the room named; and he kept steadily onward, Tamar following. It was the unusualness of this action, together with a certain restraint which she was quick to detect, that led her sharp intuition to see more in it than he had intended she should.

In this wise they arrived in the little room, fireless—as it always was till evening. He held the door open; then stepped in behind her, looked helplessly at the black grate, thought that if they went to the breakfast-room they might be disturbed, and said apologetically, "I won't keep you long. Sit down." Not alert enough to put her into his own chair, facing the window, he pointed to the one opposite, with its back to the light. She sat down; and he did the same, knowing no more than Adam where or how to begin and feeling that it would be just as well to talk about the fall of the Romans, geology, Faith-healing, growing beet for sugar-making or hemp for man-hanging, as to say: "Tamar, you must re-pack your trunks and move again." Now that he had come face-to-face with the task, not a hard one to contemplate

when distance softened the outlines, he was in the greatest quandary he had ever experienced.

"You have had a strange rough time of it, I suppose, since we saw you last," he began, hap-hazardly, as he leaned forward with a bent arm on that of the chair, his other hand on his thigh.

Tamar did not answer at once. But she filled her fine, full chest (always in a plain, tightly-fitting bodice) with a big breath, then let it escape in what would have been a very apparent sigh in almost any other woman. Meanwhile, with her face in shadow, her darkish-grey eyes, touched by that eagle-green which is said to mean wisdom, were intently fixed on Abe's face. After all, his opening remark was not very irrelevant. Not more than half a dozen delicate allusions to bye-gones had passed between him and her, or between her and 'Ola, since she arrived. Naturally, it was a subject of which two such women, under these circumstances, would keep particularly clear. As to him—he had filled in the twenty-odd days with an unusual amount of activity; treating every meal shortly, about his land or other similar business during all hours of daylight, and away almost every night—even on those of the intervening Sundays—seeing other farmers and landowners on his new amalgamation and kindred projects. So that it now seemed as if, having got a volume of weighty matters off his hands, he had found time to talk humanly with her on affairs which were morally almost as much his as hers. But, on quick reflection, the time of day was fatal to Tamar being thus deceived. She knew that, social and monetary rioter as he had been, that old-time boast of his as to his being "a morning farmer, and not an afternoon-farmer," was not an empty one. Therefore, in spite of her quiet and non-distinctive "Yes," she was asking herself whither this new venture was to lead.

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"Have you been to your own people since . . . ?" he tried again; and she quite understood that the unspoken part of his question was relative to her eighteen months' incarceration for the manslaughter of their child, of which crime a merciful judge and jury had taken a lenient view owing to the state of her mind at the time. It was this mental condition, gleaned from a newspaper, that had made 'Ola think kindly of Tamar in the matter. But her father, who would not read the trial at the time, had all along refused to believe that plea. To him she had killed the child—a crime that was unpardonable to one who loved children as he did, his child, too—thus bringing into public gaze a scandal which would otherwise have remained beneath the surface.

"No," she replied, just as before.

"Well, no,—of course not. It was a silly thing to ask. You couldn't go to them after . . . it all. You have had a good post, then?" He was thinking of the quality of her clothing, so far as he had seen it and heard of it from 'Ola; and he wondered how she had lived since her release from prison.

"No. My Aunt Joyce, who knew nothing of the affair, died just before the trial and left half her money to me," she said. Tamar had rarely been one to say more than what was needed on the point at issue, and this characteristic had grown with her since the time mentioned in her reply.

"Oh, I see," and he made a fairly successful effort to smile. "Then you're well-off now?"

"No. On the advice of the solicitors I bought an annuity of £140 a year."

"M'm, your youth and health made you have to pay a rather high price for it, I expect."

"Something of that—the lawyer said."

"Yes.—Well, it will be enough for you to live on, and fairly comfortably, too."

Tamar, unseen by him, gave the faintest show of surprise at his words and remarked, "Yes, it would be."

Without noticing her significant altering of his "will" to "would," he continued, "Then, are you thinking of going into any business of any sort?"

"No,—unless I let you have the money each year to put into the farm and help to buy it," was Tamar's answer, given with just a little more life than she had so far shown in this interview.

At this he smiled completely, genially, the dark-red hair parting just far enough to show that both mouth and teeth were strong and of good shape. "Well, that's very kind of you, Tamar; but I couldn't think of accepting it. You know, I was never a borrower."

"No, I know you are not; but things are different now." She meant that times had changed with him.

"Yes, I'm aware of that; but I shall not borrow money to mend them. I started here with what was left from the wreck up yonder, and I shall pull through with it. I suppose you heard what happened there?"

"No. I only heard that you had sold everything and gone away, no one knew where."

"Well, I don't know about no one knowing where." Although Tamar had used the expression merely as something she had heard, he saw that there was a sort of stigma underlying it, owing to what had been between them. "It's true that we didn't make a song about where we were going, but I don't know that we kept it from everybody. To tell the truth, I don't think we thought about it like that at all." He knew that he was lying, in part actually and in intention wholly. Yet there was such a suggestion of meanness about the matter, so far as she was concerned in it, that he felt he must put a better face on the thing. "When all was over—you heard of Amy's death, perhaps?" He knew

that she would not otherwise have followed him into Essex.

"Yes,—that she was dead. But, of course, I didn't go back to the neighbourhood——"

"No, of course not; it wouldn't be you to do that——"

"And what little I heard was quite round-about and in bits."

"I see." Abe paused, in deep thought, and finding relief that the stigma of having fled and covered up his tracks was not so bad as it had appeared to be. On her side Tamar had not spoken the whole truth. She knew that the little she had heard was reliable; but there might be details which she would like to hear and this was her way of asking for them.

"Well, I may as well tell you the whole story, which isn't much," he resumed. "When she got to know that you and I had been running the racket on the quiet——"

"But how did she get to know?" Tamar quietly interrupted.

"By getting hold of the bills I paid for your confinement at Scarborough. I was fool enough to put them with some others in my account book and forget them. This was about a couple of weeks after the child was born. Well, of course, from one thing she jumped to another and flew at me in a passion. However, you saw her in a good many; but they were nothing like this one. She was mad;—and what could I do, when she flung it at me? I wasn't going to lie about it, and perhaps have to tell the truth afterwards. Anyway, she tore upstairs there and then, and before I knew what had happened, she had taken poison—which I afterwards found she had kept on hand for a long time. Of course, I did what I could at once, and sent off my swiftest rider helter-skelter for Dr. Goff. But it was all no use. She died within an hour—horribly." Abe shrugged his shoulders at the recollection of that death-scene; but the shrugging was done

to hide a shudder. And Tamar saw this as she mused on the fact that her own awful worry, greater because of having been kept to herself, that had led up to and been the real cause of her killing the child, was due to a letter from 'Ola (written in haste and repented almost immediately and long afterwards) telling her of the suicide—which had occurred during 'Ola's absence—and inferentially putting it at Tamar's door. "I wouldn't see another death-bed like that, not even if it was that of a stranger,—no, not for an earldom!" Abe added, showing a considerable amount of feeling. "Then—well, the funeral was hardly a week old when I heard of . . . your affair." He meant the infanticide; from the day of which, or rather from her arrest, he had—there could be no other word for it, and it was on this point that he had now felt a keen shame for nearly a month—deserted her entirely, except for the fact that he had paid for her defence at the trial, simply because he was the father of the child.

"Then?" Tamar interrogated, some slight interest marking her even tone.

"Well, I thought it was time then to make a change in life. You see, I had 'Ola to consider—as I have now," he put in, with a sudden jerk of thought from the past to the present, and thinking that the hint was a good stroke of policy. "And as bills were beginning to come in pretty thick, and big ones, too, I sat down and went into things properly—as you may remember I hadn't done for two years. Why, I hadn't even paid that hundred and twenty guineas for your hunter!" This was said with a faint smile that was meant to convey much; but it passed almost unnoticed. "Anyhow, I soon found what a pickle I was in; and without any further to do I decided to sell out, pay all up and make a fresh start—which I did." . . .

"I see," remarked Tamar, breaking the silence.

"And you?" said he, more brightly, rousing himself from an oppression that was consequent to his recital. "That was what I wanted to talk to you about. What are your plans?—What are you thinking of doing?"

"Staying here," was the simple response that nearly took his breath away, merely because he had cajoled himself into hoping that she would, and into thinking that she might, take a broad hint and go.

"But there's 'Ola to think of, Tamar; and—and the past.—It would hardly be right to her," he rejoined, with a touch of expostulation in his voice.

"It is the past, Abe, that has decided me there is no place in the kingdom for me but here," said she, just as placidly as before, but with that latent hardness of tone now easy to detect. He was silent. She resumed, "Unless I were prepared to spend the rest of my life abroad, which I'm not. . . . You see, *I* cannot make a fresh start, like you;—*there is no fresh start allowed to me now.*"

He was dumb in the face of her cold logic, which he might have expected, remembering what Tamar had been and through what she had now gone; and he wondered how to meet her argument, when there came a hurried, heavy tapping at the window. He raised his head; Tamar turned hers towards the noise; and they saw Mrs. Briggs (now sufficiently recovered from her slight burns to be able to walk, while she "grinned and bore it," as she said), shaking a thickly gloved finger at him, and calling out,

"You didn't send me that bit of pig's fry and spare-rib you promised!"

Abe made an effort to laugh, as he shook an uplifted hand, with which he motioned towards the entrance to the house.

"Ah!" she cried, gaily, "your sins will find you out! I shan't send you a cheek again when I kill at Christmas!"

Seeing that he must get rid of her, Abe went to the window and said, "Go to 'Ola or Mercy,—they have both the fry and sparerib." Then he asked her how the burns were, and said he would call on his way through the village to see if he could bring her anything from Maldon. With that she disappeared, and Abe returned to his chair.

Again there was a minute or so of awkward silence. Then he said, catching at that only good plank in his bad raft, "That's all very true, Tamar, I'm sorry to say. But there's 'Ola to think of; and what would be said of her, if the people about here got to hear of the past, and you living in the same house again?"

"I don't know; but as you seem to have been here two years or more without them knowing anything, I don't see how they are to know things in the future——"

"That's nothing to go by——"

"But you left 'Ola's interests in the background before the death of her mother," she continued, evenly; "and, although I like the girl, I am not going to have my sufferings prolonged because you have suddenly remembered them—especially here, where there is no reason for it. Besides, 'Ola's life is in front of her and she can make what she likes of it. Mine lies behind —you had it, and I think you owe me more than you do her."

"That would be all right if we could get married, Tamar," said he, still desirous of conciliating her; for he could see that her former quiet resoluteness, particularly against wrong opposition, had certainly not weakened since the days of their mutual secret passion. She looked steadily at him, with a new questioning in her eyes. "But we can't," he added.

"Why not?" she asked, harder than before; her whole manner growing to be more and more that of a superior person.

"Because I made a vow to Amy, as she was dying that awful death, that I would not marry again."

"At her request?"

"Yes, at her request; but before the Almighty, all the same."

"And you made a vow like that for her?" There was no sarcasm in Tamar's voice, only a sort of hard, tame wonderment.

"Yes,—I know," replied he, understandingly, and incidentally recollecting that 'Ola had several times expressed the opinion that it could not be right to make vows under such circumstances. "She was weak, hysterical, furiously jealous even before I gave her any cause, empty and vain as a gilt doll. She was, as we all know, as extravagant as she could be—so was I." The subject was rousing him up a little. "But I made the land and the grazing pay, while she was a household muddler,—not a touch of what a farmer's wife should be, even if he did keep hunters and a full house too often. *But,*" he paused, then added, with slower emphasis, "she was faithful as a wife; and I was a thundering scamp, and when I made that vow I felt it; and please God I'll keep that vow!"

With this he arose, not meaning to cut the matter off there and then, but half-lost in his strained effort to speak in a degree of gentleness yet emphatically. As he stood there on a bit of open floor, between where he had sat and the writing-table, looking out at the orchard, feeling that he wanted to look everywhere else, and rapidly beginning to experience that curious sense of being ill-at-ease, which even the strongest of men feel in the presence of a quietly emphatic woman who has the position of injury—as he stood thus, she gazed up at his insolently healthy face and powerful frame, with an expression in her grey-green eyes that meant much to anyone who understood its quality. Then she broke the pause by saying,

so gently as to arrest his attention as much by her tone as by her words:

"No, I shall not go, Abe. If you turn me out,—that is another matter. I cannot compel you to let me in, not *legally*. . . . No, I shall not *go*—like that."

"All right. I must be off." And out he walked, leaving her in possession of the situation, and afraid that if he stayed any longer he would lose his self-control, which had already begun to ebb away.

During the next five minutes or so, not more, Tamar sat there, her elbows on the arms of the chair, her figure upright, hands clasped in front of her, and her resolute eyes fixed on the chair he had occupied. Then she arose and went placidly to her self-allotted share of household matters.

Meanwhile Abe harnessed the mare to the dogcart, and was gone like a shot, forgetful of his promise to call on Mrs. Briggs. Having—by the fourfold process of attainment, a conscience-awakening death-bed, stress of circumstances generally and lapse of time—overcome the powerful sensual passion of a strong, elemental man, he had previously recognised the fact that he did not possess such a love for Tamar as would peacefully ignore that vow and the fact that she had killed their child, the real cause of which he refused to believe and did her an injustice in what he thought of that occurrence. Now, strengthening this feeling of dislike, there was her annoyingly superior manner, also the equally exasperating and growing habit—as seen that morning at table—of correcting him in matters which were too small for comment. But in and through it all there was a most potent factor on the other side, his conscience—a prosecuting counsel that made eggshells of all his arguments against Tamar, and drove him into one tight corner of admitting that she had every right to demand that he should stand by her. Then he fell to thinking what might have been

but for that vow and the infanticide—even to what could possibly have happened if Tamar had returned with the boy, bonnie and fresh and innocent, and she with the clean hands of a mother, not a child-murderer. And there lay the kink in his cast of mind, the thought—coming and going according to his mood, now strong then non-existent—that she, hoping to escape punishment, had taken the child's life in a brief fit of hate, lest it should be a sort of millstone around the neck of her life; and all that he could now see in her was proof to that idea. If she had been one of the softer sort of women, he thought, it would be easy to see that she had committed the deed in real temporary madness. But, then, burly, blunt, kind and practical as he was, a man of energy in times of action and of deep thought when things were still, reposeful women did not appeal to him. That was why, the infanticide ignored, Tamar was a hundred times more fitted to be his wife than Amy had been—" with her turning up her nose at the smell of stables, her fear of going near a horse, and that silly, everlasting question, " Has it got its kicking-strap on? " As if an animal isn't always he or she, as well as men and women! Then, as the mare rattled briskly along the road, he, quite heedless of the damp and cold morning, found some relief in one of his favourite readings, so far as to quote in a kind of chant that was louder than the clatter of the wheels:

> " Oh, why did God,
> Creator wise, that peopled highest Heaven
> With spirits masculine, create at last
> This novelty on earth, *this fair defect*
> Of nature and not fill the world at once
> With men, as angels, without feminine,
> Or find some other way to generate
> Mankind? This mischief had not then befallen,
> *And more that shall befall.*"

Here his memory failed him; but he picked up the thread again at:

> "For either
> He never shall find out fit mate, or such
> As some misfortune brings him or mistake;
> Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain
> Through her perverseness——"

He had lost the thread again. The mare struck her off-fore-foot against a stone and appeared to be going on her knees, when he pulled her back sharply, saying, with a touch of anger, "Hold up, mare! What's the matter with you? All up in the wind or down on the ground like the rest of your sex?" And so back to his thoughts on life's puzzle, intermixed with bits of his farming projects; yet ever drifting back to the shaping, grinning ironies of fate, then to shake off such useless cogitations with something in the nature of swearing. It was no part of his make to solve the riddle of life; but, all the same, it was in him to stumble about it—perhaps far from it, perhaps near it; to wonder where the key of it was, and at times to be rather wild at being baffled in his blundering search.

On his return at the end of the day he found a brief opportunity to say to 'Ola, "It's no use,—not at present, anyway. She'll have to stay." Then he went out and drove off to see the elder Cawpkin.

SOWING AND REAPING

SOWING AND REAPING

I

By the King's Head, at the opposite end of the village to where Mrs. Moriety's house stood, there was a commotion that had suddenly collected half the community. During a concert organised by Abe on the previous Saturday night at the Hare and Hounds, Amariah and Wade had sung what was now known as "the Barney Song." And in his light, mischief-making way, Pinch Jellie had used the circumstance as a means of firing the jealousy of a new carter at Down Hall—one Parkins, who had at once fallen a victim to the charms of the miller's daughter. Now he and Wade had chanced to halt their teams together at the King's Head. After some words inside the public house, owing to the Down Hall man's eagerness for a fight, they had been ordered out, and got so far as a scuffle in which the aggressor came off the worst of the two. Here friendly voices interposed to persuade them about their work; and the whole matter might have ended in a patched-up peace if no more. For Wade made to depart, and Parkins was about to turn to his own team when his gaze casually alighted on Amariah, who was in the village after tobacco for her father and gossip for herself. The sight of her once more put Parkins on his mettle, making him say to Wade:

"Well, as yo' be too big a coward to fight, just see as yo' let the gal alone, or I'll gi'e yo' the biggest hidin' yo' hev hed for some time."

Pausing and turning around, Wade replied ominously, "Don't you make no more threats to me, Parkins, or yo'll be sorry."

Then a busybody put in, "Ax him what he an' she was doin' in Northend Wood las' Sund'y!"

Fired by this sally and Wade's reply, Parkins rushed back at the latter, who reached him awkwardly on his jaw and sent him sprawling. Now the little crowd was in a turmoil. The women and some of the men were for parting the combatants. Other men cried, "Let 'em hev it out, an' see w'o's t' master! They'll niver be friends till they do!" In the midst of the hubbub Pinch Jellie, who had a great dread of physical pain and thought that Abe might be dragged into the matter, took a boy by the shoulder and whispered hurriedly in his ear, "Run for Mr. Shuttleworth! He's in the church field there! And you'll get a penny when you come back."

By this time Parkins was on his feet again and taking off his jacket, while he spluttered big things at Wade. Seeing this, the latter, whose right eye was already puffing up under the blow he had received, quickly stripped to the same extent, saying quietly:

"All rite,—if yo' will hev it, yo' shall; an' I'll gi'e yo' what for."

Before he could say more the other was at him, with far more impetus than sense. Some wild blows were dealt, doing little harm. Then came a prolonged scuffle, in which Parkins' main effort was to get his opponent's head into "coventry," and was repeatedly enjoined to "stand off an' fight fair." But he got more punishing than he gave, and was presently glad at a separation. After a very brief "winding," the Down Hall man sparred up. Wade waited for him, his hands in no particular position. Then the rush came; but Wade stepped aside, drove in his right fist on the side of Parkins' head, and the latter went down as if under the stroke of a big hammer. Besides the thud of the blow and her latest devotee's dropping on the road, the only sound heard was an involuntary "Oh!" from Amariah.

During the next two minutes or so not a hand or a tongue stirred; and Wade's tall, rather lithe figure seemed to be taller than what he really was, as he stood still and upright in that sudden, intense quietude; then along the road came the rapid plump of heavy feet. Heads were lifted at the sound; and when it was seen that the runner was Abe some of the onlookers, Pinch Jellie amongst them, began to filter away; while a couple slipped forward to the prostrate man and made to lift him to his feet. Thus it was when Abe broke into the dissolving crowd, and, aided by what the boy had told him, saw something of what had happened and knelt down by Parkins' side. As he and the two men who were already there tried to restore consciousness to Parkins, by the help of some brandy that another had fetched out of the inn, several others gave him a sort of company-recital of how the fight had come about, all being loud in their assertions that the whole of the blame lay with the senseless man.

Then the Rector appeared from around the curving churchyard wall; and immediately all but three of the crowd went about their business. On the fringe of these was Amariah, subdued as she had not been for many a long day, going lingeringly, and now and then throwing a glance backwards at the knot of men in the roadway. Wade turned sullenly to his horses. The Rector heard what had taken place, and began to express his horror at the occurrence, looking the while in judgment both at Wade and Abe, but offering no hand or advice on Parkins' behalf, and secretly thinking that Abe had some share in the matter.

But a new influence was coming. There was a clatter of horses' hoofs, and up drove Tamar and reined in, with Lucian at her side. She had been to Maldon, accidentally met the young American there, learnt that he was on his way to see Abe and had offered him a seat in the dogcart. Gently she called:

"Abe."

He looked around, saw who the speaker was and went to the off-side step of the vehicle.

"What is the matter?" she asked, as he nodded to Lucian.

"Oh, Wade and this man have been fighting; but——"

"Then you had better come away."

"It doesn't appear to be Wade's fault," he concluded.

"Were you here at the time?"

"No. I was fetched and got here when it was over, or this wouldn't have happened." He indicated the unconscious man.

"Then you had better get up and come with us."

"But I must do what I can to bring him round."

"Others can do that well enough for him. You had better get up and come home."

"Well, I'll just see him safe inside," said he, with a markedly less amount of decision, and turning towards the little group. "It seems to me they'll have to fetch a doctor to him."

"And probably the constable," added she, still in her quiet way. "Make haste out of the affair.—Mr. Kingdom wants to see you on a business matter."

At this he went back to Parkins and the others and helped them to carry him into the King's Head—much to the secret annoyance of the landlord, who was thinking most of his license. Abe was very soon out again and gave an order to Wade. Then, without a word, he climbed into the back of the dogcart and Tamar drove through the remainder of the village. Meanwhile the inhabitants stood at their doors, talking of the fight, of how "the likes of Amariah" kept the young men away from better girls, and watching the dogcart go by in the waning light of that bleak day; and Lucian's mind dwelt on that curious, suggestive dominance which had seemed to him to underlie Tamar's tone and manner when speak-

ing to Abe—a trait of voice and bearing that would not have attracted the attention of the casual observer, perhaps, but which was no more lost on the live intelligence of Lucian than was the influence that it had on Abe.

"Well, Mr. Kingdom,—so you have come back amongst us once more. I thought we had seen the last of you, when you went away just after the harvest-supper," said Abe, cheerily and with some of his old heartiness, as he entered the study, whither Lucian had been conducted by Tamar, to wait till Abe had attended to some pressing matter in the farmyard; and where she had lighted a fire, quietly talking to him in the meantime.

"And I rather guess you would have, Mr. Shuttleworth, if bad luck hadn't suddenly got up against me."

"Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. I hope it's nothing very serious." Abe pulled up in the middle of the room.

"Well, no, it's just no more serious than the loss of the hundred thousand dollars I had."

"But surely that's serious enough.—Isn't it?"

"Yes,—and it isn't, not precisely. I guess it's pretty tough on the man who doesn't now how to work, or who won't work; but I figure it that it shouldn't make a deal of difference to the optimist who is just right full of good health."

"Oh, yes,—I forgot your religion," remarked Abe, and passed smilingly on to his chair; adding, as he sat down, "At the same time, I'm sorry; because, as the old saying has it, the best friend is a friend in the pocket. But how did it happen?"

"Oh, just the same dull old story that you have in this England here."

"What is it?" asked Abe.

"A will that came right down, meanlike, after the one that gave me a share in Uncle Jeb's little pile. You see, I only got this money last summer, early; and it fetched me, clicklike, from that attorney's office in Law-

renceville, Illinois—one of the finest cities in the middle States—yes, straight to Europe. I thought I would just like to see what some of the sleepy old countries were like, then I would hum right back and settle to something that a man may do and keep his liver and his hands clean——"

"The more you talk, the more I like you," Abe interrupted, with a larger amount of blunt warmth than he had felt for weeks past.

"Thank you," Lucian returned, simply. "I thought we would just about fit each other; that's why I slipped straight back here from London.—Say, you have just let it run wild, and it's grown up awkwardly." Abe smiled. "Anyhow, I was there, figuring out where I'd go to next —because I wanted to see Europe right down to the soles of its poor old feet before I went back to the States in the spring—when along comes this mail, telling me that Uncle Jeb hadn't left me a red cent over and above a thousand dollars——"

"Oh, then you are not quite without money?"

"No. You see, Mr. Shuttleworth, I'm a plain man—I should say a man with a quarter-dollar taste, which is a long way from the five-dollar one,—Isn't it?—which, I figure it, is about the average one." He knew that he had favourably impressed Abe long before this, and he was now playing up to that impression, on the supposition that it would avoid a lot of possible argument against his plan. "So when the news came," he resumed quickly, "I hadn't spent a quarter of that thousand. And when I looked around and just sized things up, I said to myself: Go right down at once and see Mr. Shuttleworth. Tell him, precisely, you want to be a farmer, and you'll give him your labour if he'll make you one."

"Is this why you have come back?" Abe inquired seriously, yet without any such doubt in his tone as the words might imply.

"That's just why, Mr. Shuttleworth."

"And you have weighed it all up——" Lucian nodded, his lips set firmly together—"what it all means to you,—this change of life and change of country,—the present and future of it all?" Again the young man nodded. "Because there's a vast lot in it all, you know, —or at any rate, you ought to know before you take the step."

"Yes, I've had it all through this melting pot, some," he tapped his head. "And I guess it's weighed up pretty accurately."

"But your parents—what about them?"

"I have none. This is how the thing hangs: An uncle brought me up and put me into an attorney's office. He died back in last spring. My dollars were from him, and have now gone to a niece of his—my cousin."

"I see," said Abe; then he returned to the intended change, by remarking, "It's a big jump, you know, from the high stool of a lawyer's office to a ploughed field in winter."

Smiling slightly, Lucian answered, quite understanding Abe's meaning, "Yes, I guess that's so, particularly when that same office is on a tenth floor back. Anyhow, I'm right in for that jump; though I don't say that it will make me change my country altogether. There's farming done over there, you know, though I must admit the trusts are right up against it."

"M'm," and Abe sat back to look steadily at the fire. Meanwhile Lucian put one knee over the other, fixed his gaze but not his attention on an old coloured print of two horses that hung over the mantlepiece, comfortably disposed of his hands and waited.

Abe was ready enough to take the young man and even to pay him something for his work, although it was usually the other way about with one who had to be taught to the hilt. But he was wondering what Tamar would have to say of such an arrangement—a young man of the

American's kind about the place day-in, day-out? If he had but known, there was no need for him to trouble his head on the subject. During that drive home in the dog-cart, Tamar, with a clever show of sympathetic interest in his affairs and the hiding of anything like mere inquisitiveness, had learnt the whole story; and, for the present preferring not to waste any belief on the lost legacy part of it, she had seen Lucian's real motive off-hand, the result being a determination in her mind that he should stay. Curiously enough, it never occurred to Abe to think of 'Ola in this matter. Presently he raised his head and looked again at Lucian, resolved that, let Tamar say what she liked, he would be master in his own house.

"Very well, Mr. Kingdom," he said, "we'll say it's a bargain; and I hope you'll never regret it——"

"Regret it! Why, sir, I'll thrive on it like a New Yorker on hot air!"

"I'm glad to hear it," said Abe smilingly. "But I'm sorry I can't accommodate you in the house,—there isn't a room to spare." To Lucian this was rather taking the gilt off the gingerbread. "I suggest that you go up to Mrs. Briggs and see if you can lodge there again; if you can, you had better have your breakfasts with her and take your other meals in the daytime here,—then you can come down to supper whenever you feel you would like to"——"Oh," thought Lucian, "not so bad after all. Then it is the room and not the daughter." "And," Abe concluded, "as it's customary to put a farming pupil up in the house, I shall be responsible for your board and lodging. Nay, I'll do more—I'll pay you wages after the first six months, because I think you will be earning some."

"Thank you."

"I think we shall get on well together——"

"Just my idea——"

"If I didn't I shouldn't take you. And I believe you've got the right bent for the soil——"

"My idea again——"

"If I didn't I shouldn't take you."

"Well, I guess that's just the way to put it; and I——"

He paused, as the door opened and admitted Tamar. "Now," said Abe, mentally, "I suppose there'll be a tug for the mastership; but she shan't be trace-horse this time."

Briefly, she had come to see how the matter progressed. And she opened the subject, saying at once and in a few words that Lucian had told her of his purpose, which she thought was a good one "because Mr. Kingdom seemed to have a natural bent for the life." Thus Abe was pleasantly surprised. And when she learnt that the thing was all settled, and that Lucian was to lodge with Mrs. Briggs, or wherever else in the village he could get a suitable lodging, she was secretly pleased: "For," said she to herself, "if he lived in the house, they might be thrown so much together as to see too many faults in one another."

"And now," she added aloud, "I am just going to make tea; so come along while it is fresh."

"Oh, tea," echoed Abe, in some scorn, this being a beverage that he never drank.

"Well, Mr. Kingdom would like a cup, after that cold drive, I've no doubt," she remarked, passing out of the room.

The two men left their chairs at the same moment; and Abe, putting one hand on Lucian's shoulder, said, "Take my advice, let tea alone. It's nothing but a foreign, nerve-destroying thing that ought never to come into the country. Drink milk, ale, anything almost but tea, and you'll bless the day you gave up drinking the stuff." With that he made for the doorway, Lucian at his

heels, smiling and saying he thought there was some good in the advice.

So to tea they went; and, with three self-satisfied persons in the quartette, it proved to be the most pleasant meal that the house had known, outside the kitchen, for some time past. As to 'Ola, who had not seen Lucian arrive and was unaware of his presence in the house, till he and her father entered the room; when she learnt the news concerning him, she became so filled with wonderment as to take but little share in the conversation. What her thoughts were, in virtue of what had already taken place one way and another, and in view of the general aspects of the situation, the reader will more readily imagine than can be set down shortly here. One thing may be recorded: When Lucian left the house, soon after tea, 'Ola was still so preoccupied as to attract his attention and set him wondering in turn; for, like her father and unlike Tamar, he thought of every possible thing—chiefly household dissensions—that might distract her, except his own unexpected presence. Nor did he forget that she had her "moods," so far as he already knew her; because he argued that she was naturally bright and soon flung despondent fits aside, and that she had too much practical commonsense to be long weighed down by anything that was not really serious. So what was the matter? But, then, all the world knows what a lover is. Besides, Lucian had yet to learn what a resolving pivot Tamar was in the life of the Hall Farm.

This was the atmosphere of things when he left the house and went humming up the road under the stars, to the village. But, for some subtle reason that Lucian could not discover, there was so small an amount of life in his humming that he presently "pulled himself together" and began to cast about him for a cause of this unwonted under-current. That, however, was not to be found offhand. Had he been the least superstitious he would have

put the feeling down as a presentiment of coming harm. As it was he looked at the naked hedges, before and behind along the silent road; then up at some straggling Essex elms, standing great and gaunt to the heavens, as sentinels of night; and so on to where Mars and Saturn seemed almost to "glower" in orange and pale yellow, high over the western horizon. Then he halted, jerked his thoughts back to hard earth, and asked himself what he had eaten to upset his liver in this way. He could not answer; so he shook himself like a retriever coming out of water and barked out, as he again strode away—

"And to be a far-mer's bo-o-OY,
And to be a far-mer's BOY!
For to plough and to sow,
And to reap and to mow,
And to be a far-mer's bo-o-oy,
And to be a far-mer's boy."

But it was no use. The burst ended in no more than a small yelp, after all. And so he broke into the long, irregular street of odd cottages, with here and there a larger house. Just before reaching Mrs. Briggs's comfortable habitation he met Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, who was bustling her large figure along in a manner that spoke definitely of unusual happenings. Darkness had properly set in; but Lucian could see that her ample face was full of untold things. Squaring herself before him, and with no breath to spare at the outset, she rapidly flung off, heedless of the sharp night air and everything but the tale she had to tell:

"Oh, Mr. Kingdom, so you are back with us again! and I'm *so* glad, and I'm sure we *all* shall be! Yes, you came from Maldon this afternoon—travelled down from London to-day, I suppose—with Miss Pringle, the Shuttleworths' friend; she drove you over in the dog-cart,—quite stylish.—And she *does* drive well, *doesn't*

she? I wonder how she does it.—She *must* have a lot of nerve!—But, I say, *have* you heard the news?"

"No," said Lucian, genially, and wondering how long she would have continued had her breath held out.

"Well, that man," and she lowered her voice to a proper pitch for the occasion, "from Down Hall, who fought Wade and wanted to kill him, and—and do other *dreadful* things; well," here her voice became little more than a whisper, "*he's dead.*"

"Gee, I say, but that's——"

"Yes, it's quite true."—So it was, as the general excitement was beginning to show. But Lucian managed to squeeze past her, all the same, and arrive at Mrs. Briggs's. There he found a difficulty in edging his way through the small crowd, of women and girls mostly, who, under the guise of buying postcards and half penny stamps, were talking in strained undertones of "the murder." When, at length, Lucian contrived to convey his errand to the postmistress he found the old welcome awaiting him, and there he remained.

So the night passed; day came; truth was known; and Lucian began the work of a farmer, in his own way, in a way that endeared him to the heart of Abe. That is, having heard what was to be done, he took it on himself to harness-out Bess and Turpin; for he had chanced to learn that a mare and a horse would work better together than two of the same sex would. Here Abe came upon him, smiled and asked him what he was "up to."

"Guess I'm just going down to the ten-acre by the "saltings," * along with Simmons; and if I don't plough a straight furrow before sunset—well, sir, you shall tell me what no other man has." Simmons, the son of the old sexton, was a young man with a great love of practical jokes; but he had no thought of playing one on Lucian.

* Land that is half reclaimed from encroaches of the sea.

"What's that?" was Abe's amused question; as 'Ola went by, lingeringly, her face still full of thought, her tongue quiet, and her quick-moving eyes so eager to take in everything that she did not think to hide her interested watchfulness from Lucian.

"Tell me I'm no better than the next man." And he threw the briefest possible side-glance at 'Ola.

"But you must go a little slower than this, you know," said Abe, almost laughing; "or in a twelve-months' time I shall be losing my place as the successful farmer in this corner of Essex."

Lucian passed the joke aside, and called to Simmons to hurry up. Here 'Ola reached the gate in the holly-hedge on that side of the garden, still within ear-shot, and she paused, turned and looked back. It was evident that this young man had too much cock-sureness and needed reproving—if only to prevent his pride from presently tripping him into some ditch.

"Tell Mr. Kingdom, father," she remarked, her clear tones carrying easily through the sharp morning air, "that in England here we believe in deeds, not words; and he must work more and boast less." Then, regardless of Lucian's unconcerned reply to Abe, and as if quite indifferent to all the world but herself, handsome in face and full of the graciousness of gentle curving, she opened the gate, passed through and disappeared behind the thick hedge—with a sudden regret in her heart that she had not smiled with those words, so as to take off any keen edge which they might have to the young man who was putting his first foot on what was to him a new flight of steps in the stairway of his life. However, it was too late to mend the matter, except by a sort of surrender which she was not prepared to make; so she would square it up with him by a kindly joke or two when he returned to dinner.

But Lucian, although misunderstanding her real drift

—as well he might—and not quite liking the manner in which she spoke, was not the one to go to his self-appointed ploughing lesson with his heart either on his sleeve or in his mouth. He was not only "an optimist by persuasion;" he had come back to this bleak and biting corner of a dull county of heavy soil with a purpose at his heart that was far too big for even a host of little reverses to affect seriously. And, meanwhile, as he did not believe in doing anything by halves, he would indeed learn to be a farmer. So how should a little slight like this one touch him out of humour with his great intention, or even temporarily with himself? Why, as she turned in at the little gate, all her beauty and—to him—some of her temperamental attractiveness emphasised by that plain print frock and the big, chin-high apron, had left on his mind a picture which had more than twenty times the power—warm and breathing and moving to noble ends—to clear the foulest sky that had ever come over his landscape. He was young,—he knew he was young enough to be carried away by the glamour of a forlorn hope; young enough to feel his heart go thumping like a mad thing against his breast when he looked on the lovely colouring of her face, the easy grace of her movements and that "talking" of her eyes. "Why, he would be a man of stone who didn't feel a warm thrill at her presence!" said he to himself. "Every yokel in and about the place would be hopelessly in love with her, if he dared!" Self-schooled on the best of Emerson—on what he termed "the outdoor Emerson; the Emerson that loved Montaigne, Bacon, Milton and scorned the effeminacy of the Lake poets"—typical of all the best of his nationality, clean of mind, sound of wind and limb, life and the world before him though his dollars were lost, his was a mind well-fitted to reach the goal in view,—providing there should be no temperamental set against him on her part. On that point he had small doubt; but, all

the same, his policy, after carefully studying her ways, was to proceed on lines the very quietude of which would make them safe.

And so to his ploughing went Lucian, feeling that this morning he could sing "Marching through Georgia" miles better than he did on the afternoon of that summer thunder-burst; that he would even have pitted himself to sing "The Farmer's Boy" against that cheery-faced, wrinkled-up, squinting, old Jinglejoy, who just then shuffled up his lovable little self, to bear Lucian company down to the ten-acre—beguiling the time (as if Lucian's thoughts were not enough for him!) with bright bits of rough philosophy on life, tinctured by the brown soil around them, with scraps of countryside lore of vegetable and animal life and with a final injunction to learn to love the plough as a sailor loved his ship, then he would make a fine farmer and be happy. And now somewhat understanding that call of "the cool brown earth," which he had previously known only by poetic intuition, his healthy nature really revelled in the scene, the work and in the novel situation in which he found himself. He noted afresh and more deeply the tall, gaunt elms, with here and there an ash black in bud, and yonder a row of pollard willows, all stripped of their verdure; and the tops of the leafless elms, especially, forming a beautiful tracery on the clear grey-blue sky. He saw how some of the oaks were still greeny-brown, while others bore the deep tints of autumn on their thinning leaves. He heard the robin's sweet, autumn melody, whenever Simmons turned the team by a hedge, and saw the bird hop into the new furrow to look for food almost at their heels; and down by the brook a late sedge-warbler was apparently trying to persuade himself and all who heard him that winter was still some distance away. And whilst Lucian entered these features on his mental tablets, now and then glancing at some coaster on the wide river, and

deemed it all fair and full of health, he noted most the deft manner in which his tutor turned the heavy soil with the gleaming ploughshare; till presently he took the cord-reins in his left hand, gripped the handles of the plough and found that the making of a straight furrow of uniform depth was not so easy as he had considered it to be. All the same, when the gathering dusk sent them home from the lonely field, when the night air was putting on a keener, nipping character as it swept in from the darkening sea, and was ripped by the loud bittern in the bulrushes on the inner edge of the "saltings" he had kept his morning boast—as Simmons readily confessed to Abe, and 'Ola was curiously pleased to hear.

II

So Christmas went by at the Hall Farm—not the "good, old-fashioned, rousing Yorkshire Christmas" that had been talked of and decided on prior to the coming of Tamar; but a quiet affair of feasting and semi-idleness, in which no one seemed to take any particular interest. Of course Lucian spent the time at the farm; and Abe signalised the festival by announcing that at the end of the following year he would give a bonus to every one of his workers who remained with him during the whole year. He had paid the second third of the value of his original holding; this was largely due to a lucky transaction in red Essex wheat, a big quantity of which he had held till, owing to foreign complications, the market had reached fifty shillings and six-pence a quarter. He had also made £3 a quarter on pedigree wheat; so that he was generally pleased with himself. Both the Cawpkins, who had held on to their corn till the prices fell with a run, had sent Abe and his party invitations to sociable evenings at their farms, as other neighbours had; but father and daughter had put their heads together and declined, thus annoying Tamar into greater frigidity. However, Abe held his ground, because he had 'Ola with him in the matter and the adjunct of so much of Lucian's strong company, together with that of Dunstan,—of whom he was making more and more as the months went by. At the same time, to smoothen matters out, a couple of evenings were spent in entertaining their friends in and about the village. So

that the occasion was not allowed to go by altogether in a sort of mourning.

Meanwhile Wade was lying in Chelmsford gaol, awaiting his trial for manslaughter. He had been before the magistrates at Maldon and was committed to the Assizes. Some results of this and the general opinion that Wade would "get five years, sure," were a marked quietening down on the part of Amariah and other "hair-brains an' waggle-tongues," as Jinglejoy termed them; also a falling off in the gossip of Pinch Jellie, and a consequent inclination to "preach" in the hearts and minds of Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling and the Rector. To the retired grocer this had another side: he had been looking forward to having his respectability and social position in the place recognised by being made a sidesman at the coming Easter vestry; but that honour now appeared to be out of the question, and, in his vindictive little way, he blamed Abe for this disappointment,—because it had "all started at that rotten harvest-supper." Jonas had given his daughter "a bit of square talking to" anent the manslaughter case, more as a "business matter" than anything else; then he had limped off unconcernedly to dress his nether millstone, while Amariah had shed a few hot tears and spent rather more of her evenings indoors. In fine weather Kester Nobbs was going about on a pair of crutches, saying he was sorry for Wade, and that if his accident had not laid him up he would probably have given the Down Hall man a lesson; at which others smiled and mostly treated the repeated announcement with charity. For Kester was generally liked, in spite of his particular characteristic. The genial, white-haired philosopher-butcher had moved into the village and started a chess club that met twice a week in the parlour of the Hare and Hounds; but was to have its meetings, along with similar recreations, later on, in the new village hall. This was a proposed building which would owe

its existence to the energetic instrumentality of Abe, who had persuaded Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling to stretch her purse-strings to the handsome promise of £100, in the hope that it would be a large step towards the realisation of her ambition to be termed "Dame." Mrs. Briggs had lost one of her favourite breedings sows, the animal being run over in the high road by what she termed "a murderous motor car." Otherwise there was no change, either in her or in Miss Scopes, and apparently would not be till nature brought them the greatest change of all.

As to Lucian and 'Ola: they had grown into the habit of going with Tamar to church on Sunday mornings; while Abe generally managed to reach there in the evenings. But, with the exception of a growing yielding to angry moods because of Tamar's inflexible persistence in remaining one of the household (a subject that had been tacitly shelved by father and daughter, although she did at times in her heart, blame him for his "weakness" in the matter) 'Ola was much the same. In her general bearing towards Lucian there was little difference from what it had been during the first month of his apprenticeship to the soil. On his side there was not a whit of change in speech or manner; to make anything of that sort was not his purpose as yet. He was, he told himself, playing the part of Jacob; and he was poor and must bide his time, even if that time should lengthen out to the biblical seven years. His reading of 'Ola was that she was one to whom time must be given to come; that she was not one who would ever be taken by assault, but would have to be humoured, courted in a manly and respectful manner, as one who knew her value in a fine womanly way and in spite of any passing dark or sunny mood. What slight change had come into their conduct towards each other consisted of an unnoticed, and as yet only occasional, freedom of speech and bearing such as would naturally come of daily intercourse; the larger

part of this being due to pretty frequent discussions on literature, music, &c., in the study at nights and mostly helped along by Abe; to evenings at cards in the parlour, and to the fact that they always walked together to and from the weekly entertainments, which Abe had brought about in the village as a break in the dull monotony of rural life in winter, and in which Lucian had proved to be a very god-send both as an entertainer and as a general organiser. Yet once, when they stumbled on the subject of faithfulness in love—due for the most part to some unuttered thoughts of 'Ola's, with her father and Tamar as the starting point—she turned it off to twit him with the supposition that he would be a light-of-heart; in answer to which he that night wrote, and presented to her on the following day:

"I would not give her up; though all the world
  Cried out—'Forego!' and, standing in between
  My love and me, e'en strove and fought to screen
Her from my sight; like bird on wing unfurled,
I would o'ertop the seething crowd, though hurled
  I were a thousand times aback, and lean
  My heart to hers. Though wells of envious spleen
Should seem—*my angel white, fair, pure, impearled*
In human form—to paint her black as night
  Where moon nor star looked out, and hating scorn
Thrust its envenomed finger at her bright
  And purer soul, I still would her adorn
With all my love—yea, find a sweet delight
  In clinging closer to my heart's dear bourne."

To this 'Ola made no reply; nor did Lucian venture to raise the subject again. In fact this was the general conduct between them whenever such a matter came uppermost in their talk; in his mind it was "better to let a thing ripen slowly than to scorch it off with too much heat;" and hers was a woman's part, varied according to individuality of thought and temperament.

Thus were affairs when, one afternoon early in Janu-

ary, Lucian was surprised by a hand-borne note from the younger Cawpkin, saying that the writer would call on him that evening at his lodgings. The letter had been left at the Hall Farm, marked "urgent," and was sent at once to Lucian, who was in the Long Meadow with Abe, exercising some horses which the latter had bought to add to the breeding stud that he had started in the previous spring; as he had already done with a particular breed of red cows that gave every promise of being heavy milk-bearers, and with a certain brand of Suffolk black pigs. To this work Lucian had taken keenly, much to the elder man's satisfaction.

Seeing his pupil's perplexity at this unexpected missive, Abe said cheerily, "Hope it's nothing out-of-the-way, Mr. Kingdom."

After a brief pause, Lucian replied, "Well, no; but it's just up against me to know the meaning of it." Then, on further reflection as to the niceties of the situation, whether or not he ought to speak to a third person of the message he added, "It's a request—no, I guess it's what you would call a statement, straight and no bunkum, that Mr. Madoc Josiah Cawpkin will see me this evening at my lodgings."

"M-m-m?"

"Oh, there's no denying it, and no sugaring it down. There it is, short enough to be true and true enough to be short; and the whole name, big and no fancy, right across the bottom of the page."

"Funny," commented Abe, thoughtfully, as he held the two animals' heads.

"My, but this person has a weight on him, some.—No, I have no home,—that's true, only a lodging, but it wasn't on the bill that you should tell me, *Mr. Cawpkin,*" Lucian meditatively remarked, looking down at the letter and opening his mouth wide in order to get out the full value of Cawp. In truth, he was annoyed at the

tone and the sort of commanding nature of the message.

"Well," Abe observed, thinking of possible outcomes of such a meeting, and remembering how completely he had taken his pupil into his confidence regarding certain projects in agricultural matters, which most of his neighbours would readily have dubbed "Socialism," "mind your p's and q's, Mr. Kingdom; he looks like a fool, like so many more do in these parts; but like most of them, he's not quite all he looks."

"That's all docketted and pigeon-holed, sir; don't you waste time on that track," replied Lucian, now with a light yet meaning irony in his tone; "for you must know 'if I can catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.'"

"Eh, what's that?" Abe asked quickly, not knowing whether he ought to laugh at what Lucian said or wait till he heard what lay behind.

"Only a way of saying that I owe this same short-mannered gentleman a certain small debt that I shall pay when the ear is fat and full.—But don't you fear, any; I guess I know my book." His understood meaning was that he respected Abe's confidences, as he did in full; for the liking between them was thoroughly mutual. "And, anyhow, he's not after favours. Listen to this: 'Mr. Kingdom. Sir. I will see you at your lodgings to-night. Yours, Madoc Josiah Cawpkin.'" And Lucian looked up at Abe, unpleasantly remembering that he was to have spent the evening at the farm, and with a reminiscence of the crude slight that Madoc put on him at the harvest-home. Abe said no more, curious though he was on the subject.

It was between seven and eight o'clock when Lucian heard the hammering of a horse's hoofs on the hard road. They stopped immediately outside; and, looking through the window of his sitting-room, he saw Madoc—who

prided himself on "riding to hounds"—dismount and secure his reins to the garden-palings. A couple of minutes later Mrs. Briggs ushered him into the cosy room, saying that if nothing was wanted she was going down to take a last look at her family (the pigs) for the night. Lucian wanted nothing; and Madoc, with apparently unwillingness, took off his hat, as Mrs. Briggs closed the door. Then Lucian, noticing the other's slow respect, arose, put down his book, bowed formally and said:

"Good-evening."

"The same to you," was the blunt, awkward answer.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Well, I don't know as I need sit; but I suppose I may as well, all the same." And he bent his long self into the low, horse-hair-covered, old mahogany, easy-chair that Lucian had indicated opposite to his own seat. Then the latter awaited. He could see clearly that his visitor was in a state of embarrassment, which Madoc was trying to hide by "bluff." But it was no part of Lucian's plan to help him to an easier frame of mind. On the contrary, he was pleased to see this mental condition, and he fully intended to make all the capital that he possibly could out of it and everything else that came in his way during this interview. But when the silence had become so protracted as to be decidedly "starched"—as Lucian put it, in his mind—he remarked, in a tone that would have been annoying to any one of fine susceptibility:

"You wished to see me."

"Well, yes, so I did," said Madoc, raising his inexpressive eyes from his big, distant, brown boots, which the riding gaiters made to appear larger than they were. "The fact is, I should like to know what your intentions are about Miss Shuttleworth." And, with a certain kind of dogged courage, he looked across at Lucian; remembering unpleasantly how this stranger had attended on 'Ola

at the harvest-home and during the recent Christmas party.

The latter, without a vestige of surprise, and, indeed, feeling but little, queried gently,

"In what way?"

"In what way? Why, what way is there but the one way?"

"Will you kindly be explicit?"

"Explicit? What do you mean? Isn't it plain enough?"

"No."

"Well, what the devil do you want?"

"Excuse me, just a little, I never swear in this room; nor in that of any other man, where I happen to be a guest."

"Who the devil cares for that?" asked Madoc, who, of course, could not see through Lucian's placid humour. "What do you want?"

"First of all, that you shall behave yourself as a man while you are here," Lucian answered, with now a shade of warning in his voice; for, despite his intention to play the mock heroic or the gentle novice, he was beginning to be offended at the other's manner and rising tones. "Then that you will be good enough to explain your question concerning Miss Shuttleworth and my humble self," he more quietly added.

"Well, I'll be d——"

"No, you won't be here," was the soft, arresting interruption. "And really, you know if you cannot speak with more respect to yourself, *and to me,* I must ask you to call another time."

"Well, what on earth do you want? Isn't it plain enough? What are you hanging about her for?"

"'Hang,' my dear sir, means to 'suspend.' But, come, now, let me ask a simple question: What relation are you precisely to Miss Shuttleworth?"

"Relation? Relation be damned!——"

"Gently, gently——"

"I'm no relation—of course not! What do I want to be a relation for?"

"Then who gave you the authority to ask me such a question?" queried Lucian, in the tone and bearing of an experienced senior, while in truth he was between three and four years the younger man.

"Authority? What the——" There Madoc paused, staring hard at Lucian, in sheer bewilderment at the other's manner and drift. Then he broke out with, "Look here, I was in this field, and had it to myself, before you put your American nose——"

"Now, hold at that, or, by Jonathan, I'll put a screw-whif on you that will make you see hell in two ways at once!" At the second word Lucian was near Madoc's great feet, towering over him—far better built and only half a head shorter—in a way that made his pretended anger appear to be the very incarnation of righteous punishment. Madoc gaped up at him, thunder-struck. "Call my inoffensive nose a beak, a proboscis, a smeller; even say it is eternally damned and no nose at all. But bring in the name of my country as a stigma, and, by the gods, I'll mop the floor with you, then wring you out and hang you up to dry. Now, sir, be pleased to finish your remarks; but be brief. You have already robbed me, discourteously, of half an evening at the Hall Farm; and I will be gone."

With that Lucian backed slowly and with proper impressiveness to his chair; in doing so he took the additional precaution of keeping his eyes fixed on Madoc's, for he was uncertain, and in a slight degree even anxious, as to how this tactic was to answer. He had, however, no need to fear a surprise-attack. Madoc was no coward in everyday matters; but Lucian's studied style of addressing him, combined with this sudden "flare-up," had mo-

mentarily dumfounded him. As, with his eyes open wide as they would stretch, he watched Lucian back across the hearth, he was asking himself if the American had just lost his senses. He had previously sized-up Lucian's probabilities in a tussle; and, while he had come prepared to try the hazard of a throw under ordinary conditions, he was far from being ready to meet the same powers accentuated by madness.

Lucian, thinking that to be able to expend his feelings in a real, good, roaring laugh he would give a twenty-dollar bill—had he possessed one—saw that the joke had taken root, and was beginning to feel some urgency to leave it there, lest the frost of some untoward happening should come along and nip it off. So he added, in the same tone of offended dignity,

"Come, sir, I am already two hours behind my appointment."

This second reference to the Hall Farm in such a connection was too much for Madoc; it not only jerked him out of the deeps of questioning amazement, but it brought him to his feet so suddenly as to send him stamping towards the door. At this action a smile broke across Lucian's face. In that instant around swung Madoc. He saw the smile, pulled up and growled out,

"Look here, are you playing the fool on me?"

The last few words were almost drowned by the whinnying of his horse.

"You would be a fool to let me," Lucian replied in a light, matter-of-fact tone. Madoc swore. "But come," Lucian added, changing his manner again to one of some severity, "I want to be going. Is this precisely the whole of your business with me?"

"And isn't it enough? By ——, I think it is!" He returned to a position near the chair. "But, look here, Mr. Cleverman, you may be mighty spry with your jim-crack ways—*you* learning to be a farmer!—but you'll

go to no Hall Farm this night 'nless you fight me first, or promise to stop hanging about Miss Shuttleworth."

Again the horse whinnied; and Lucian remarked, "Hark, your own animal laughs at you." For answer Madoc glared at him, and felt that he could kick the horse. "And you would attack my pocket, because I am now so poor as to want to be a farmer, would you?—as well as my person?"

"I'll attack that damned fancy head of yours in two minutes, if you don't hurry up and settle it!"

"So melodrama is your style,—is it, some? Perhaps you would like a little sword-play?" said Lucian, banteringly.

"Swords? Aye, or anything else with you!"

"Oh, you would, would you?" and up he leapt, throwing himself into fencing attitude and adding, in exasperating gaiety, "A rapier and a woodland glade! Yes, that's it,—

"'A woodland glade and a flashing blade
On a sunny afternoon, O!'

Or," with another quick change of attitude, "a frosty morning, snow on the ground and pistols, eh? I think those are the usual stage accessories in a play or novel of that sort. Then the blood-streaks on the virgin snow, etc. Gee, what a picture! But perhaps you can't shoot just straight, except at harmless birds with a shot-gun; and as I can hit a five-dollar piece at fifty yards, the pistol business wouldn't be quite fair between us." Madoc was again watching him in growing surprise, but now with a marked degree of anger also, and at last he broke in with:

"Look here, are you going to stop this damned tomfoolery and come to the point, before I punch your head here!"

"Right you are, sonny; as you seem to be determined

on getting pricked, we'll go at once to the point. But don't you blame me any when the pricking's done." He turned his back to his chair, recollecting his previous intention to speak the best English he could in this affair, because he had learnt that the half-informed were in the habit of putting a discount on anything that was said in Transatlantic twang. There he re-faced Madoc, put one hand on the top of the chair and continued, now in a hard business-like manner. "So you want to try a throw, do you—in real earnest? Well, as I should be main sorry to have any of Mrs. Briggs's estimable furniture damaged, I will ask you to come with me to a suitable place along the road, where we can batter each other to our heart's content——"

"I'll come anywhere," was the blurted interruption.

"Then I shall be very pleased to accommodate your fancy." He began to hunt for a pair of boots in a corner on the right of his chair. While he leisurely put on his boots he rattled on in a light yet serious tone on the art of boxing, comparing one style with another till Madoc began to think that he had a professor of the ring to deal with. When he was ready he arose and said, "Now, Mr. Cawpkin, I am at your service—as I hope I always shall be," and he held the door open.

Ungainly and uncomfortably Madoc arose and passed out. Mrs. Briggs, who had been handy, followed them to the open air, Lucian unconcernedly telling her that he would not want supper, as he was going to the farm for that purpose. Just as he gained the roadway, however, the constable drew near, and Lucian's thoughts changed instantly to: Instead of going to a suitable spot with Madoc, there "wind" him, then give him "a talking to," as had been Lucian's intention; why not give him in charge for threats of violence and intimidation, then force him into keeping quiet by arranging to hush the matter up or let him go before the magistrates, then fight him

later on if he remained truculent? No sooner thought than set in motion.

"Constable," said he, "take this person in charge."

Then came the quick action of the baffled man, to whom this was rank cowardice and all the other "bunkum." He would "have one in, anyway, and square the policeman afterwards"; and with that mental brevity, he rushed at Lucian, to find himself knocked silly before he could get anything home. As he dropped, up came the constable, in something of a quandary at seeing who the disturbers of the peace were. At the same moment Mrs. Briggs advanced into the breach, saying:

"It's Mr. Cawpkin that is to blame, constable! It's all his fault! He has been threatening to do I don't know what to Mr. Kingdom inside there! And you saw what he did now!"

"Mrs. Briggs," said Lucian, putting his hand on her shoulder, all his affected carelessness gone now that the matter had assumed a serious aspect, "please leave this precisely to me. Neither you nor I want to rouse the village." At this juncture Madoc confusedly pulled himself to his feet, and his horse whinnied again, apparently to another in a meadow on the other side of the road. Turning to the policeman, Lucian added, "Now, officer, I make the charge to you that this person, after using threats of violence, has made an unprovoked assault on me, as Mrs. Briggs and you have witnessed; and I leave it with you whether or not you shall lock him up for a malicious breach of the peace. If you do so, I shall appear against him. I am going now to Mr. Shuttleworth's, where you will find me during the next hour or so if you want me. Good-night, Mrs. Briggs.—Don't wait up for me."

And, thinking off-hand that this was the best way of closing the matter up, as the constable would probably allow Cawpkin to go home, because he had not been given

in charge, Lucian turned and went his way through the biting air, the white moonlight and deep shadows—at first a waning feeling of real annoyance, then whistling merrily as the frost-crisped earth crunched rapidly under his feet.

III

But, after all, Lucian had not missed so very much by Madoc's "ignorantly interfering action," as the former termed it on his way to the farm. He had to thank the "hayseed" for giving him the better part of an hour's amusement and a settling of that "ancient grudge"; while if it had fallen to his lot to keep the appointment in the early part of the evening, it would not have been to have 'Ola for a partner in the usual game of whist and varied talk. On the contrary (as he had already done, when Abe had gone off unaccountably "to see a neighbour," because of some disagreement with Tamar) he would have had to sit in the parlour, passing the time away as best he could; while 'Ola sat at some distance, reading or stitching; and Tamar occupied the other point of an irregular triangle, always with a piece of needlework at these times—for "the silent woman," as she had grown to be spoken of by the farm-hands generally, was no reader. Then there would have been those spells of solitude and reflection, when Tamar suddenly arose in that quiet way of hers, said, "Excuse me, I must see to——" so-and-so, and left the room, taking a sort of chill with her; to be followed almost immediately by 'Ola, on a similar excuse, but really to show Tamar that she "saw through her leaving them alone, but was not going to be thrown at the head of any man, and especially not in that way by a woman who wanted to see the back of her."

The cause of Lucian's not losing any pleasure that night was that at about half-past six, and quite unexpectedly, the Rector called. He was shown into the par-

lour, with its mingled evidences—some jetsam from the former home—of a finer taste than is usually found in an ordinary farmhouse. But, then, the Rev. Mr. Chapman had previously seen these things and had already lost interest in them; so, as both 'Ola and Tamar were either about household matters or upstairs, he stood with his back to the fire, his coat-tails under his arms, his chin well elevated, and his mind engrossed by the subject that had brought him here and for which he was prepared even to forego his dinner. When Abe came in from the stables, a few minutes later, and found that his visitor wanted "to have a little talk about the Institute," he led him off to the study, wheeled him a chair up to the fireside, and began to produce whisky and cigars from an old corner-cupboard on the further side of the room.

Meanwhile the Rector looked around the walls, noted the old sporting prints, mostly of the prize-ring and the hunt, and said, "M-m, you have a lot of books, Mr. Shuttleworth." As a matter-of-fact he had heard of this room, and sometimes thought he would like to see the inside of it; but his interest in extraneous things and matters had seldom enough energy to prevent their pretty speedily dying of inanition.

"I don't think them many," Abe remarked, with his head half into the cupboard. "I often wish I had more."

"Do you really?" The Rector had put on his *pince-nez* to scan the titles. "M-m, very varied, I see."

"Yes, as I believe I've read somewhere, 'give me the mind all spacious wrought, not pinnacled to one high point on one sole thing.'"

"No doubt, no doubt. And this young man you have with you now, this Mr. Kingdom, he is—er, intellectual rather, is he not?"

"Well, if you mean he has read a lot and thinks for himself and, I believe, does a bit of writing on the quiet,

—yes, if that's the intellectuality you mean, well, he has it."

"That is a fine encyclopædia; I wish I had it," he said to himself; then aloud, "Do you think books do good on the whole?"

"Good? Why, what else can they do? Don't you think so?—Will you help yourself?" asked Abe, indicating the whisky and water, and saying, as he rang the bell, that he would have some soda water brought in.

"Yes, thanks.—I am afraid I do not. It is all the fault of an unrestricted press that we have this unrest and dissatisfaction among the people to-day," replied the Rector, as he went closely along the rows of books.

"By 'the people' you mean the working classes?"

"Yes,—and the upper classes, spiritually."

"Better dissatisfaction and further effort in the light, than dull content and stagnation in the dark," was Abe's half-indifferent comment, as he poured some whisky into a glass.

"I don't know,—it is a debatable point."

"I'm glad to hear you say that;—it is, Rector; but I hardly thought you would admit it," and he smiled, remembering past encounters.

For reply the Rector read, "'Burton's Arabian Nights.' Why, that man used to have a maid-servant take coffee to him in bed! And 'Don Juan,' the openly unmoral work of a person who left his wife for other women! And the 'Decameron,' and that other awful Frenchman, Zola! And 'Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, and What I saw There'?" The last title was read in a slow, questioning tone.

"Yes," said Abe, seating himself and selecting a cigar, "you have found 'the shelf of delectables.' Now come and have a smoke."

"But you don't let Miss Shuttleworth read these books —Do you?"

"Certainly,—if she wishes to," Abe answered, smiling, and striking a match for him.

"Whatever for?"

"To help to make her a woman, instead of being a fool in petticoats."

"You astound me!"

"I dare say. But you must understand that I don't *put* those books into her hand. They are here, and she can read them if she wants to."

"Yes; but being here, she is sure to find them."

Abe laughed and said, "Oh, then you know women well enough for that, Rector. You know, some of you young clergymen make a man think at times that you know nothing outside theology."

The Rector was not much under thirty, as Abe was but little over forty, and that "young" rather touched his near susceptibilities. It was for this reason that he hastened to say, "Well, now, about this 'Village Institute,' as you seem to be determined to call it."

"Yes?" Abe queried and waited.

"Have you really made up your mind that the Church shall not have it under her wing?"

During the next minute or so Abe looked steadily yet amusedly at him; then, blowing out a big mouthful of smoke, he said genially, "Do you know, Rector, you remind me very often of Pinch Jellie and a few others I've known?—men and women, both,—poor souls with not a living thing to cherish, and not even a human man's love for growing things, like a few flowers or spring vegetables."

"I know that you are merciless when you begin, Mr. Shuttleworth."

Then both men sat back for a few minutes with their cigars and thoughts, during which Abe mused, "I must not rap out too hard, or I shall be cutting off my nose to spite my own face." For did he not want this man's help

to bring the proposed Institute into existence, and to "run it effectually for the benefit of all?"—not because the man himself was such a *desideratum*, but because of the monetary and other assistance which he could bring to the work, and the following that would naturally flock at his heels; in fact, because he was the rector of the parish. Had not he, Abe told himself, striven from the outset, while some dislike had pulled the other way, to rouse this man from his apathy to a live sense of his duties to the place? Had he not pointed out, in those visits to the rectory for that purpose, what certain other villages were doing in the way of clubs, entertainments and the like during the long dreary nights of winter, even to the extent of persuading and arguing till he was "nearly black in the face?"—and sometimes with such downright nailhead talking as to get dangerously near spoiling his own sowing, during which he had arrived at the conclusion that this slow-to-move head of the parish was about the most "thick-skinned" of all the men he had ever known. But, then, Abe had never possessed that insight which detects the niceties of character. To him all men were, broadly, lumps of humanity; beyond that point he attempted no exploration, because he had no bent that way. On the other hand, however, and still of a piece with this, perhaps no man had a better conception of the generalities of femininity; but certainly no man ever failed more completely to see the component inequalities, contradictions and agreements that went to the making of any separate entirety in the sex. It had been so with his dead wife. It was so with Tamar and 'Ola, and apparently would be so with all. This was, perhaps, why he made such blunders in his dealings with women. At the same time he further deceived himself, and was helped in that delusion by the truth of those generalities, in thinking that he could "read a woman as a calf sucks milk." And here it was that he made one of his most grievous mis-

takes with the Rev. Mr. Chapman; for, instead of the latter being in anywise "thick-skinned," much more delicate shots than Abe's direct forcefulness found their way in under the epidermis of his personality, there to lie and wriggle—unsuspected by anyone beyond his understanding wife—secretly working the havoc of little devils from time to time; just as they were doing now, while the two men waited, in smoke-laden silence, for the soda-water. And Abe, thinking that he still had some further latitude in pounding the mentality of his guest, bethought himself that he must not go too far, or he would "put a frost" on this promising crop for which he had so perseveringly ploughed and harrowed, weeded and fed the previously unyielding ground. As for the Rector: physically idle and mentally content with dulness, providing that it did not so far intrude on his privacy as to bore him, he had come to this tussle deliberately; prepared to take all the intermediate hard knocks and tumbles, and to take them as uncomplainingly as suffering flesh might, so be that he went away victor in the cause that he had at heart. To himself he readily admitted his past dilatoriness; saw that this strong and restless northerner, after "stirring things up a bit," was now shaping his new, rural institutions into good working order; and was becoming such a figure in the countryside as to compel all whom it concerned either to pull with him, or to stand up publicly as an opponent to his disturbing energy. And what could the parson of the parish do but yoke in with the team, now that he saw it was pulling evenly, with its shoulders set well into the collars, for the homestead of success? To do otherwise would be sheer silliness, and a worse back-hander to the church than that of which he was already guilty. Besides, and this was where the two men's minds unconsciously touched the same point: If the Rector should succeed in his purpose—or rather Mrs. Chapman's—he would, at one and the same time, be ex-

tending his own field of influence and authority and be putting his hand to a plough that already lay side-by-side with a well-made furrow; and Abe saw that in "bringing him into the swim," out of which it would be difficult for such a man to retire, he would be doing him the great service of forcing him out to honest work amongst his fellow-men, and so, perhaps, helping to broaden him altogether.

Presently Abe lifted his glass and said, "Rector, here's to the 'Institute.'"

"I say the 'Church Hall,'" the parson answered, showing a long-delayed smile; and so, each to his purpose, they drank. "And now, Mr. Shuttleworth, let us see,—you say you have £320 promised towards the building."

"No, I've got £354. I bagged two tens, two fives, a three and a one at the cattle market to-day."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it. Perhaps that is why you are so alert to-night."

"No, it isn't. I've been in prime fettle all day to-day, as we say in the north."

"And these are all safe promises?"

"Safe as the bank. So I think we can go ahead with the building."

"You have done remarkably well in a short time."

"Yes; it's the only thing I ever did in my life at a jump, except take a fence. I've always had to make a journey for what I wanted before."

"Most of us have," the other observed, unable to resist the opportunity for a thumb-nail sermon. "And your estimate says £500 for the Hall?"

"Five hundred for the 'Institute,' yes." The Rector nodded and smiled again. "Then there will be the furnishing—chairs, tables, games, a second-hand billiard-board and that,—perhaps another £50."

"And you say that the builder is prepared to leave the balance unpaid at four per cent?"

"Yes, providing there's some sort of a guarantee to pay it within, say, four years."

"And can you manage to get that?"

"Well, if I can't, I'll stand it myself."

"That is very generous of you."

"Oh, I don't know. It's a sort of 'burning desire' of mine."

"That is evident."

"Well, now, once more, will you weigh in with me and help to manage the thing? You have the time necessary, and I haven't; besides, it should be something in your line."

"What is it you want me to do now?"

"Get in this money that I've been promised, then work together to bring the thing into existence and see it properly on the road, till others will come in and relieve us." In spite of himself the Rector was surprised that a man should be prepared to labour so prodigiously, then stand out, when the thing became a success, and let others have the pleasure of office without the trammels of initiatory toil. However, that was a matter for the future. "You see," Abe continued, smilingly, "if you come in and add your name to the idea it will give it a sort of standing that nothing else will, hereabouts. That is, people would stump up their money, knowing very well that if the thing fell through, they would get the money back; and others would follow suit, naturally, when the thing got a public send-off with a parson in the traces, so to speak. Besides, my hands are very full just now and likely to be all the summer, and I should like to see the building up before next winter."

Said the Rector to himself, "More amazing candour. This man is a child and does not know it:" then aloud, "Yes, I see all that. But," and he braced himself for the grip that he knew would follow, "come now, why not let it be the church's affair?"

"Because I want it to be the village's, and the village's it *shall* be."

"Why?" was the unperturbed question.

"Because, if I can prevent it, the Institute shall belong to no sect or creed, and no sect or creed shall have a domineering hand in it. It shall be for all—or it shan't be at all, so far as I'm concerned—and it shall be governed by an evenly balanced committee picked out of all parts of the parish," Abe answered warmly.

"But that is Socialism."

"Socialism be blowed! Excuse me,—but these miss-fire definitions at serious times rather rub me the wrong way.—Am I not a living argument for the creed of individualism?"

"Well, yes,—in a way, certainly," was the confused and half-doubting answer.

"I think I am, and a bit to spare. But this is the way I look at things.—Happiness, it seems to me, is the birthright of every man and woman—that is, honest, healthy happiness;—just as doctors should be paid by the State, and all men have an equal call on all the science of life-saving, which ought not to be at the high-priced buying of any man,—seeing that life, population and that is a State matter. Why, look how the poor beggars in the village here were put to it not twelve months ago by that rage of typhoid fever,—doctors coming and going and taking their money away, and not one of them hardly with a shilling to spare above the bare needs of life. That's why I want them all to have a share in the thing—in its 'Doctor's Club,' its 'Social Club,' its 'Blanket Club,' 'Boys' Club,' 'Pigs' Club,' and all the rest of it."

"And that is why you insure their pigs at present," said the parson, showing some amusement, and desirous of a change in the trend of the argument.

"It is."

"But it cannot pay you at a penny a head per week, and half the money returned at the end of the year if no pig dies."

"Yes, it does, and to spare,—which they get back, as perhaps you know."

"I have heard so," and he bent on Abe such a long, pitying, half-amused, searching look as would have made any self-conscious man begin to feel awkward; then he added, not without a touch of condescension, which Abe missed, "You are a rather curious mixture, you know, Mr. Shuttleworth."

"I don't know whether I am or not, and I don't care. But I do know that God made me a man, of a sort, and the chances of life made me a farmer; and every day, or nearly, I pray: God me grace to be a man. Let me have that prayer answered, and I have no other to say, except: Forgive me."

"I think, you know, that you would have made a good politician, because you have humour and can give hard knocks." It was a concession that gained nothing.

"Then I don't, and for one simple reason."

"What is that?"

"I can't lie enough."

"But you would have learnt how in time," said the Rector, quite believing Abe.

"Perhaps; but I should have been a long time at school, although we do all learn the road to hell pretty easily,—one way or another. No, Rector, that's a trade I was never cut out for; and, what's more, I should consider it a calling—if you can say it is one—that's beneath the honesty of a man who was born to be a farmer."

"As I said before, you hit hard, when you begin."

"That's one of the results of living face-to-face with hard nature; she spares nothing, because she has no reason, and we do the same when we have none. But let us get back to this bone-picking of ours."

"I have no desire to pick a bone; I am rather too fond of a cut without bone," was the feeble attempt at a witticism, as an effort to check Abe's growing seriousness.

"Well, let us call it 'clearing the air,' so that we can go ahead together; it's all one to me, providing the job is done."

"Well?" was the resigued answer, made in forced half-cheerfulness.

"I believe I have the honesty and the justice to admire others when they're in earnest——"

"I think so——"

"And the pride to go my own way——"

"That is certain," came the more cheerful concession. "But have you seen Mr. Edge?" This local landowner was usually spoken of as "the Squire."

"No, I haven't yet."

"Well, will it surprise you to hear that he may not give to the fund, unless the place is to belong to the church?"

"No, it wouldn't."

"But he has to be reckoned with."

"I can reckon without him in this case." Then Abe fixed a steadily inquiring look on his visitor's face, presently to break the silence with, in that quiet, masterly way which he sometimes used, almost unconsciously, "Rector, did you ever hear the fable of the poodle-pup and the mastiff?"

"No," said the other, showing a faint interest, but more in wonderment as to what the new lead was.

"Well, just settle yourself back comfortably for a few minutes.—Have some more whisky,—help yourself,—that's it; and try another of these cigars,—good. I think I'll have another, too."

When he had lit the second cigar and found it drawing in good order, Abe threw himself back in his chair and began:

"Well, a certain man had a fine big mastiff sent him;

and news went about the canine circles of the place that the newcomer was something very unusual—something to be proud of even in the dog-world. At anyrate, it was generally considered that the only proper thing to do was to call on him without delay. In fact, the idea was that if he proved to be all that rumour said he was, there must be a sort of court, paid to him. So, accordingly, the respectable dogs of the neighbourhood made haste to see Mr. Martiff; and his fame grew till all the dogs had paid court to him, except a few of the most disreputable and socialistic ones. (Because, as I dare say, you know, Rector, it's a curious fact that the average socialist is too crude and ill-mannered to be social with anything that is better than himself.) However, it happened that there was a certain poodle-pup lower down the road, an animal that got a wash sometimes and thought the sometimes came too often. He was a pup that might some day be a dog, one that lived on scraps and hardly knew what a biscuit was. And he had sworn all the time, after the manner of his sort, that *he* would pay court to no mastiff —no, not if that mastiff were the king of dogs and all other beasts. But at last it got so bad that he couldn't go to the gate, without a cold nose coming through and saying something about the majesty, or the splendour, or something of that of the newcomer, who was never allowed out of his master's grounds. So that, finally, the pup said he would have to go and see what Mr. Mastiff was like. He had no respects to pay—because he paid none to anything but a stick or a flying boot—although he must pretend to have. You see, it was curiosity, first and last. Anyhow, off he went, one fine day—swaggering up the sunny side of the street, dirty and fluffy, with his tail up like a long pot-hook, and all the courage of his tribe in his heart. Now when he came to the gate of the house where the mastiff lived, the only place where he could get under was where there was a puddle; but

puddles never made any difference to him—they seldom do to that sort of dog, whether he has two or four legs. So under he went, half-emptying the puddle on his legs and body, and up to the house he waddled. You see, he had, as we say in the north, been better fed than taught. Well, as I've said, it was a fine day; and it happened that the people of the house were doing some moving, or something of that, and some of the furniture stood outside; and there, in the sunlight, just under one of those curious mirrors that make you look six times bigger than you are, lay the great mastiff. Even the poodle-pup thought he was a wondrous fine fellow. But just then—and this is a kind of trick that life plays with so many of us—the little chap looked up a bit and saw himself in the looking-glass, with a tail sticking up behind him like the spout of the town-pump, only much longer. Then he looked down again at the mastiff, that lay there like a noble beast, watching him and saying nothing; and that didn't seem, to the poodle, that is, to be any bigger than the pup in the mirror. And he, the pup, said to himself —'Oh, so you're the great, fine, splendid, majestic creature I've heard so much about!—are you?' And he looked again at himself in the glass, quite a long, steady, careful look. Then he dropped a glance, just a sort of it-doesn't-matter peep at Mr. Mastiff, and said, to himself, 'M-ff, I'll go home again!' And he turned round, with a last look at the mirror and remembering the lying one he had seen at home, that made him seem to be quite so-so in size. And he went down to the gate, swaggering, sniffing, with that pot-hook tail hanging up behind. And he crawled through the puddle again, with the top of his dirty back getting a chance-scratch under the bottom of the gate; and as his fluffy head came up on the other side he sniffed and muttered, 'It puzzles me what some dogs see in others—or in themselves.'" . . .

"Well," said the Rector, who had so far lapsed back

into himself as to speak in such a tone of indifference that Abe was a little annoyed at it, "what is the inference, Mr. Shuttleworth?"

"That there are some poodle-pups about here, Mr. Chapman," Abe answered rather abruptly, and gave further emphasis by leaning forward in his chair. "But, all the same for that melancholy fact, their presence will not affect the mastiffs; and though they may retard the work a little, they won't stop it."

"Very well, Mr. Shuttleworth, shall I become treasurer from this point?"

"That's just what I want."

"Then you will leave it to me to see Mr. Edge and get what I can from him?"

"Certainly—on the lines I've said, unconditionally. What I want to do, and am going to do if I can, is to make this village a model for Essex; and for that reason and every other reason I think that all these efforts to brighten rural life and make the poor content to stop on the land—content to be poor, in fact—should be run on the broadest possible lines. But, there, I think I've said enough on that score."

"Yes, I think so," was the half-smiling answer.

"Then we quite understand each other at last?"

"Quite."

Then they fell to discussing the proposed labour colony which, it was rumoured, a London borough was about to start on the inland side of the village—a project against which "the Squire" and the parson had set their minds, while Abe stood up as an advocate for it, providing that the men who were brought there should be real "back-to-the-landers." With that the Rector arose and returned home to his delayed dinner, deciding in his weak way, that, as he could not bend this stubborn farmer to agree with him, the only thing to do was to work with Abe in the latter's own way.

Immediately after the parson's departure, in walked Lucian, hardly able to keep his laughter within bounds. Seeing this, Abe asked for "a share in the fun." So, having extracted a promise that the matter should go no further at present, because he had an objection to its reaching 'Ola's ears, Lucian agreed to tell his story. They were both in a very pleasant frame of mind; and having closed the door, made themselves comfortable, with whisky, cigars, &c., they delighted each other with an exchange of stories till supper time.

But it was not to be that Abe should go to bed in this easy condition of mind. After seeing Lucian off back to his lodgings, Abe returned to the study, thinking of 'Ola and his pupil as he had never done before. A few minutes later Tamar walked quietly in—on the face of her visit, to see if he wanted anything. He did not; but she did. She wanted to know what the Rector had come about. Abe told her; with the result that she took an opposite view to his as to the wisdom of his not allowing the Rector to have the proposed Institute under the wing of the church. It was but a small item, in a way; yet it was a link in a long chain of adverse opinions—differences in thought as to his actions here, there, everywhere, that were being blindly riveted on him by persistent small hammerings, and almost entirely on matters that were of no real moment to life and usually done when no third person was present. And it was this triviality that largely helped to make them so irksome to him. He had always hated petty interferences; and of late it had become habitual to him to object strongly to any kind of influence unless he directly sought it; and it was observable that he hardly ever asked Tamar's opinion on a subject. Being naturally of that mould from which the masters of men come, and knowing it, he had always been annoyed when what he knew to be a smaller mind than his own sought to divert his intentions or to warp

his judgment. And now this trait, under a condition of life that was galling more and more weck by week and—according to his idea—would not bear discussion, was developing into a nervous irritability that he hardly recognised as yet. Thus it was that when Tamar differed with him over this matter he came so near a burst of temper as to ask her unmistakably to let the thing alone and go to bed—he wanted his "last hour for the day in peace." And she went—with that perverse spirit of opposition rankling in her, like unquenchable steam seeking an outlet through impassable ice; and giving him, as she moved placidly towards the door, such a look of questioning injury as would have remained with him for some time; but it passed unnoticed. Nor was he to have that last hour in peace. On the contrary this "interference" led to the calling up of a long string of what were really petty efforts to change him in one way or another; till at last he sprang out of his chair, flung his pipe into the fender and went out into the night, heedless of the fact that the moon was then hidden by a southeast scud and biting rain—out to where he could stretch his big chest and breathe more freely; out to where he saw again the shrieking, vow-given death-bed of his wife, who had always been faithful, uplooking and never interfering although extravagant, hysterical and shallow; out to where, as was growing to be his habit, he saw the two women in all their contrasting points, and found that he loved the memory of his wife as he could never love the one-time paramour; out to where that infanticide again loomed up large in his judgment, and for the hundredth time he looked on her presence in the house as his just and apparently permanent punishment for being the more or less dirct cause of those two deaths, and quoted from the Psalms that were typical of his attitude of mind and largely so of the circumstances.

IV

It was unfortunate for Abe, his purpose as to the proposed Institute and for the Rector that the latter—on their mutual agreement—had no sooner relieved Abe of all work and responsibility in connection with this village clubroom and theatre, than family troubles so occupied the Rector's mind and took him from home so much as to make him cast around for some material help in the work which he had taken out of Abe's hands. At the instigation of Mrs. Chapman (who had always disliked Abe, and now detested him for "interfering in the peace of the place" and stubbornly refusing to let her husband have his way in the matter of the new building) the choice had fallen on Pinch Jellie, he being the only one at hand with the necessary time to spare and the clerical ability to do the work. To this arrangement Abe offered no objection, because he knew nothing of how the little man hated him. To his mind Pinch was merely an empty-headed dandy, who had "made a bit of money in those ordinary ways of trade where any man could make it if he was dishonest enough." Thus the Institute affairs had passed very considerably into Pinch's hands, one pivoting little scene occurring at the outset.

This was when the Rector sent for Pinch to ask if he would take up the work of collecting the promised money. It was one wet afternoon; but "the Lady" arrived almost as if he had dressed for a garden party. In their hearts both the Rector and his wife had some contempt for Pinch's effeminacy; but while the former's was merely a milk-and-water sort of feeling based on no particular

interest and little analysis, Mrs. Chapman's more astute and stronger mind saw the dapper little grocer much more as he saw himself than any one else did. It was from this intuition and her husband's forced employing of Pinch that she secretly argued a possible good; to which end she there and then suggested—in a manner that implied a mere echoing of the Rector's desire, which Pinch and some other persons knew—"that it would be a far better thing if this money could be collected for a church building than for a place that would belong to everybody and nobody." Quick, understanding glances at once passed between her and the Rector, and between her and Pinch,—the latter saying to himself, "M'm, I see." Then Mrs. Chapman, eager to prevent the marring of any good effect that the hint might have, ventured the opinion, to her husband, "that Mr. Jellie had, perhaps, better collect the money on a written understanding as to what it was for." She meant, as she explained in the fewest words possible, that he should get from each giver a written statement as to what the gift was for and to supply a receipt to that effect. To this the Rector said, "Yes, of course," saw nothing further in it; and his wife, with an adroit closing of the subject and turning the conversation to other matters, handed "the Lady" a cup of tea. Soon afterwards Pinch (who always gave in guineas, because there appeared to be a greater professional air about guineas than there was about sovereigns) announced his determination of giving twenty-five guineas to the fund—in the firm faith that he was now at last entering the inner "Rectory circle;" that he was, in a way, making a point against the big, rough farmer, and that such a munificent gift would save him from the villagers' opprobrium as to Wade's affair. Thus while the indolent cleric, disturbed by family affairs at a distance and thinking of a journey on the morrow, saw nothing untoward in the proceedings; and Mrs. Chapman

sat back in her chair, feeling that she had done what she could in the matter, and must rest content to leave her bread upon the waters; Pinch Jellie went home, telling himself in quiet glee that now he would take a "handsome revenge on that blusterin' farmer," who had so often, yet in a way good naturedly, heaped ridicule upon him.

Side by side with Abe's desire to have the Rector in the forefront of the matter, one of the chief causes of all this and of its subsequent trouble was the fact that Abe's hands were becoming fuller and fuller every week. Foremost amongst these things were his amalgamation projects, some new efforts on the scientific side of farming, and a scheme for tackling the Gt. Eastern Railway Company on the subject of reducing their rates for carrying farm produce. To this latter end he was thinking of interesting certain members of Parliament, to take the matter further—"but not any of the cheap and discredited 'Socialists,' who happened to be M. P.'s by the ironical chance of fate, because they would do no good to any honest reform that had to be persuaded in justice from the hands of hard capitalists and monopolies." Abe had been made chairman of the Parish Council, and the parish's representative on the Rural District Council, and was using his influence and energy to fight down narrowness whenever he found it in any form. Then he was just launching into what promised to be a big lawsuit as to the delivery of a large quantity of barley, which the merchant had said was "not up to sample;" and as this happened to be a long standing sore point between merchants and the local farmers, Abe was all the more keen and anxious to win the case for the agriculturist generally. Besides at this time both he and Lucian were putting what inventive faculties they had to the improving of agricultural machinery. This had come about by the young man seeing, during the sowing of spring seeds, how to improve

the drills so as to sow enough without waste, particularly in the matter of turnips, mangolds and that, thus avoiding subsequent labour in "singling out" and hoeing. Abe had followed with a harrow for tearing up weeds from between rows of turnips and other roots. For these they were seeking patent rights, and trying to arrive at other improvements. So that with big ventures out of the house, and indoors a series of petty annoyances which were leaving on him a deeper mark than either he noticed or others dreamt of, he was glad to be rid of the necessity of interviewing donors, architects or builders. As for the petty *et cetera* of the matter, a capable master of detail though he was in his own affairs, these would only have tended to exhaust what had always been a small stock of patience where others could not see as clearly and act as quickly as he could.

Now had come a series of sewing meetings at the Rectory, for the purpose of making articles which were to be sold at a "Bazaar and Sale of Work" in aid of the building fund. But the interesting point in these Rectory gatherings was the fact that they had led to an immediate sort of friendship between Tamar and Mrs. Chapman—a happening expected by no one, even if anyone had thought of it. The first meeting had been a big muster. 'Ola, as the daughter of the original mover in the matter, was there; and being in one of her light-hearted moods, and forgetting—as she regularly did now in times of peace—that Tamar had taken a life and been to prison, what could be more natural than that she should take with her this "friend of the family." All possible help was needed, and Tamar was an excellent hand at designing and cutting out. Hence had come a friendship between two women whose tastes were really much alike, who dressed in similar ways and had a kindred attitude towards each other. So that by the time the third meeting took place, this matter had become a general topic

amongst the women. This was particularly the case with Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, who could not avoid the pretty frequent feeling that "the lady of the parish" did not look on her as a lady, and that "the Rectory people" might at least have made more of her than what they did. And Tamar was there on this occasion, as Mrs. Chapman's "right hand,"—a quiet, deft, perfectly composed source of inspiration, as ready with her own needle as she was to set work for the needles of others. In fact, as much at her own desire as at the rather pressing invitation of Mrs. Chapman, Tamar had attended every one of the meetings. It was not so with 'Ola, however; who had been absent from all but two, because she did not "like empty gossip" and was not great at sewing. And she was away from the present one, owing to her father having gone to market that morning, after an "upset" with Tamar.

"Well, I think it is scandalous, myself, the way she sets all the young men in the place by the ears." The speaker was Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling. She, Miss Scopes and a couple of other women were carrying on a low-toned conversation. They formed a little group apart from the others, and the subject of their talk was, of course, the miller's daughter; who had now regained much of her wonted shallowness in love affairs. Mrs. Waylett, the unimaginative wife of the people's churchwarden, agreed that Amariah's doings were "a disgrace to her sex and the neighbourhood, and she could not see what on earth the girl's father was doing not to correct her a bit more."

"Oh, he's too busy running his mill and trying to make himself landlord of the Hare and Hounds," lightly observed Mrs. Briggs, who was anxious to talk about a pig of hers that had won a prize at a recent small cattle show.

Miss Scopes charitably thought that it would be better if Amariah were to get married to one of her half-dozen lovers.

"One of them," sniffed Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling. "Why, that would only make matters worse. It's my opinion that instead of being wife to one of them she would be wife to the lot, because then she wouldn't be afraid——"

"Oh, I don't think *that* of her, quite!" put in Miss Scopes; while one of the others said much the same.

But the big woman with the long purse thought so; and—while Mrs. Briggs, with that pig on her mind, wondered how they could talk of such things—she brought forth the idea that had filled her thoughts all along. This was neither more nor less than the deportation of Amariah—with the latter's consent, of course, and with that of Jonas; but still deportation "for the good of the parish" was the actuating object, as one of the custodians of the parish's virtue and respectability, her suggestion was to persuade "the young minx" to leave the place. The others, saying that "Wade would get five or ten years owing to her," thought it was a good idea, but would be futile in operation. That concession, however, was enough for Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling. Her heart was set on the venture, and when that happened her purse would stretch to almost any extent. As to how she was to effect such a "coming about"—well, that was her affair; and having got the assurance of such as Miss Scopes and Mrs. Waylet that her proposition was a good one, it only remained for her to see it carried out. Besides, and this was the great *desideratum* of the whole matter, look how the success of it would enhance her in the eyes of "the Rectory people!" That was enough, and duly did Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling bustle about her task there and then.

Thus it was that Amariah, after compelling her father secretly to pay her railway fare, on the threat that she would not go at all otherwise, started for London with five golden sovereigns in her pocket—leaving Jonas to be "looked after" by a woman in the village,—this being his "business" gain in the affair—mostly at the arranged

expense of Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling; who cried her victory from the housetops, as near as was compatible with her desires and the conditions that hedged her in so uncongenially.

But the matter did not end there. Some days after Amariah left home, Wade was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, and would have received a heavier sentence but that he was forced into the fight. As a matter of course, this filled the village with fresh comment on the trouble. And Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling (who bore a secret vinegarish dislike to Pinch Jellie, because he would be so smilingly familiar at times) took occasion to stop and speak to Warriner on the subject, as he was finishing the "shoeing" of a cartwheel outside the smithy. But, worst of all, she had the indiscretion to say, all too plainly, that "the waggle tongue who caused the young men to fight ought to have a severe ducking or something of that sort just to make him mend his manners in future." To which Warriner agreed, with proper deference to a lady who had a long purse, gave her yearly guinea to the football club and studied to use local idioms—such as a lady might and as a lady should—when talking to a native, as she had now talked to the young wheelwright. At anyrate, the seed took root as desired. For that night Warriner sought out Simmons (who had now fully taken Wade's place in Abe's employ) and three other kindred spirits, with whom to discuss the subject of giving Pinch Jellie a thorough dipping in some duck pond. For the better and safer arranging of their project they went down to the Green Man at the riverside, a mile away, and there arranged their plans over a glass of ale each. After much talk it was decided to inveigle the intended victim to Abe's mill, secure him to an arm of the sail, "frighten the life out of him by a few spins around, then let him go." As to their getting him down to the mill at night—according to Simmons, nothing was easier. Mr. P. J.

had gone so much to the Hall Farm of late (as the Rector's unofficial secretary) that he, Simmons, thought—with no idea as to how near the truth he was—the visits were as much to see Miss Pringle as anything else. (As a matter of fact the dandy, by his own artful management, had only seen Abe three times in the course of a dozen calls.) Anyhow, Simmons knew that all they had to do was to send Pinch word that he was wanted at the farm and he would be there in no time. How send him word? —Oh, any boy would take the message for a penny.

Thus the preliminaries of the escapade were settled; and, true enough, four nights later, when the weather chanced to be mild, fine, and the forepart of the night was dark, Pinch Jellie was summoned to his front door, where a thin treble voice informed him that Mr. Shuttleworth wanted to see him down at the farm. Glad of an extra visit, suspecting no wrong, and eager to be rid of the boy lest he should be expected to part with a penny for the message, Pinch said "all right," hurriedly shut his door, and was very soon afterwards on his way to the Hall Farm. Quite gaily he tripped along—for, being something of a featherweight and as agile as a youngster, he was very light on his feet—in some of his best clothes, of course, and looking as spruce as a godfather at a christening.

In the interval the jury of practical jokers gathered in one of Abe's outlying barns, where, by the aid of a shrouded stable lantern, they disguised each other with soot and previously prepared false beards made of black sheep's wool. Their plan of attack had been already decided on in every detail. So that when the victim came jauntily down the road-side, they leapt from under the high hedge. Before Pinch had time to utter the least cry a big soft muffler had been tied around his mouth; his arms were pinioned; he was rolled in a small rick-cloth and hurriedly carried through a gateway and back,

behind the hedge, to the mill. Under the great arms of the sail—each one 36 feet long, over a ton in weight, and the upper ones black and gaunt against a starry sky—they dropped their burden, none too lightly. Pinch groaned, but no one knew it except himself. In his own mind, he was being murdered—how, exactly, he could not tell, unless it was to be by very slow smothering. Yet he felt that he was nearing the great Divide. And what was it for? In that chaotic yet lightning run of his thoughts, he could recollect nothing for which he had deserved death. Sly, shallow, flippant or a sycophant according to the necessities of the moment, never with more courage than the safety of the occasion required, one whose heart was beyond the touch of either real wrath or real pity, he could think of no reason for serving him in this way, unless it were to put him out of the way before robbing his home. He remembered the tent-dwellers who had recently camped on the Common, and thought that he must have fallen into their hands. But, again, how did they know anything of his connection with the Hall Farm? Yet "caravaners" were said to be strangely cunning. Oh, that he could shout! To do this he would have given half, perhaps more, of that "snug little fortune" which he had made by sharp trading, and had expected to secure him rural deference and social position.

Then he was carefully unrolled from the rick-cloth, in a loose portion of which he had found breathing-room; and he saw where he was,—saw the black, woolly-bearded faces of his molesters; the great arms of the sail, seeming to be black against the night sky, and he wondered what on earth they were about to do with him. On this point, however, he was not left long in doubt. For he was speedily rolled again in the cloth, to prevent him from injury in the cold air; but this time with his head out, so that he would not smother—the present intention being to whirl

him around a few minutes; then to leave him at the end of the arm till supper-time, after which they would take him into the stables, to be discovered there in the morning by "accident." In any case they must have him down long before midnight, as they knew, because the moon would be pretty high by that time.

When the cloth was again tied around him, he was at once lifted to the end of the sail arm, where it was 8 feet across, and instantly found himself being secured to the woodwork with an abundance of stout cord. So much did they pass about him in all directions, that it took the whole five of them, some behind and some in front, quite five minutes to do the cording only. During this time Pinch Jellie became half delirious with fright, wonderment and vain efforts to cry out. He knew that no one who chanced to pass along the road, over a hundred yards away, would think of wandering aside to see what was happening at the mill. He also knew that passersby were of rare occurrence there after nightfall. He saw Jonas's cottage, a little towards the village but on the mill ground and with its front facing up the road; and he remembered having seen a light in an upper window, as he had hurried lightly by on his way to the farm. Would any one come out? If he could only shout he might be able to make them hear! And shout he did. Having secured him satisfactorily to the sail, his captors thought that it would be advisable to ascertain whether or not he could still breathe all right. For this purpose two of them partly unloosed the muffler about his mouth, and so bungled in the matter that Pinch managed to get out a yell of fear.

But let us look into the cottage. Behind the glazed green blind of that upper front-room Amariah was standing in her last garment. Her right hand seemed to be trying to push her left elbow to the back of her head; while the left hand was down her bare back, where the

fingers were doing their work, as she muttered in a sort of painful joy—

"What a glorious thing it is to get a good healthy scratch when you hitch!" Having enjoyed "a rare old time" with Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling's five pounds—as she intended to—Amariah had returned home, almost at the heels of the young men as they made from the village to the barn to prepare for Pinch Jellie's coming. Tired, cold with her ride in the carrier's cart (driven by Kester's assistant, because this was Kester's biweekly Witham day) and knowing that her father was either at the Hare and Hounds or away poaching, owing to the dog not being in his kennel, she had gone straight to her own room, warmed it by the aid of a paraffin stove, made herself some tea there, and was now preparing for bed; while she smilingly thought of how the "housekeeper" would stare when she came in the morning, how certain ones in the village would laugh when her return became known and Mrs. H.-T. would fume when the news reached her.

"Drat them fleas!" said she, now pushing the right hand as far as possible down her back. "Specially them London fleas; they're . . . I believe they're worse than all—seem to nip you so vicious . . . expect I got it in a 'bus, goin' to Liverpool Street. That's where they get, hiding in the seats, ready for a nice bit of fresh country flesh—drat 'em!" And she made a grab at her left side. "Wonder if kings an' queens and lords and ladies ever itch—course, they have no fleas; but they might itch a bit now an' then, they live high enough, according to all accounts; if they do I suppose they'll have some one to scratch 'em—an' that can't be near so nice—undignified, p'r'aps, to scratch themselves . . . E-e-e-h, what . . . a . . . treat!" Now both hands were at work.

Presently, with the lamp in front of her and looking through the garment in her search, she began a system-

atic hunt for the alien, talking to herself the while on what she had heard her father say were the main characteristics of Russian versus Egyptian, and Spanish versus English fleas. But in it all there was a considerable amount of admiration for that unusually fine if rather slight shape which she saw as she gazed down the inside of the garment. Like, yet unlike, Diane de Poitiers entering Goujon's studio, she would have stepped uncovered, unashamed and unembarrassed into the presence of any man whose pacific intentions she had felt sufficiently assured, or towards whom she had been satisfactorily drawn. A modern Ninon of the hedgerow, she—according to the ethics of such things to-day—was not immoral, only unmoral, whatever that may mean. And, like so many of her "betters," her pleasures were her greatest enemies. She meant no harm to any one, nor did she attain to any, directly; but the evil of it all was a small vortex of immorality with her for the centre. Meanwhile some of the local good young women went husbandless longer than they should have done. As for the future, what thought Amariah gave to that "never interfered with her prayers," as Pinch Jellie had been known to observe.

Suddenly her head jerked up, and she stood motionless, listening, the wide neck of that cotton garment held half-unconsciously in both hands, well away from her breast. Amariah's sharp ears had heard something; but she knew not what it was, except that it was a shout of an unusual nature. Quickly slipping on a long black jacket that hung handy, she hurried to the ever open window of her father's room at the back of the cottage, where the sound had come from. There she faintly discerned the young men moving hurriedly about the arm of the sail, and at once shouted, in a voice that was made unintentionally stronger than usual by the force she put into it,

"Aye, what are you doin' there?"

Muttering that "the game was up," and not recognis-

ing Amariah's voice, the whole party went helter-skelter over the wooden fence; Simons being the last of them, because at the moment of Amariah's inquiry he had been on the point of entering the mill to start the sails.

Seeing this stampede, yet hearing more that she saw, the miller's daughter—who had never been known to lack courage where the investigation of men was concerned—hurried downstairs, bruising one of her shins in the dark kitchen, and was speedily hastening to the mill with a big lantern in her hand. First she saw the open door, drew it to its place and turned the key in the lock. Then she wheeled sharply about, rather apprehensive of what might suddenly appear out of the darkness. But nothing came; and, holding the light well in front of her, she approached the sail arm, saw the bundle at the end of it and hastened forward, to exclaim, as she held her lantern close to Pinch's half-hidden face,

"Oh, goodness! it's you,—is it?"

And the young men, who had paused on the other side of the fence, nearly laughed outright, in spite of themselves. "Well, I never! And gagged, of course!—and —but there! Somebody been paying you out for some trick, I'll bet—and you deservin' it, a hundred to one." Then down went her lantern, and off came the muffler with a jerk, while his ferretty grey eyes looked on her in more wonderment than gratitude. "Well, I always told you as you'd get yourself hung or something some day. You know you *will* go potterin' about things that's nothing to do with you." Meanwhile she was deftly and quickly hauling away at the numerous turns of rope with which he was secured; he beginning to ask himself, owing to her words and manner, if she were a party to the whole business. Then he dropped and got a bump on his head, for which reason he further thought that she was "in the swim." Still talking lightly to him, mainly on his peccadilloes, she untied, unrolled and finally set him free. Be-

yond being cold and stiff, yet shaking with fright, there was nothing the matter with him. Amariah saw this, as the thought that, after all, there had been no intention to harm him, or they would not have wrapped him up so well. But she could not allow "the poor beggar to go all the way home as he was." On the contrary he must go indoors with her and have a cup of hot cocoa, an invitation, put in the imperative, which he, still wondering greatly and rather confused, was glad to accept. So in they went; and, the moment they were inside, over the fence jumped Simons to throw the rick-cloth, cords, muffler, &c., to the others, then back he leapt, and away they sped, the whole five at once making for safer quarters and chuckling as they hurried along.

But "the Lady's" troubles were not yet over. Leaving him with a candle, Amariah ran upstairs for the lamp and stove in her room. With these in the kitchen she proceeded to boil water, and otherwise offer whatever refreshments she could find—knowing very well that there would be nothing intoxicating amongst them, because her father would not have any kept in the house. Whilst waiting for the water to boil, and having nothing else to do, she inadvertently turned to that bruised shin—as naturally heedless of her visitor as she would have been of one of her temporary lovers. This caused him to see the scanty nature of her clothing, and instantly to his lips there came a remark that jerked her upright, still with the bottom of her jacket and the other garment in her hand, and her eyes flashing on his face. The next instant she had cleared the space between them and given him the sharpest smack on his cheek that he had received for many a year; she crying, "Take that, you handful of foul weather!"

Then she pushed him and the chair over; and when he struggled to his feet, she, with many pieces of righteous vituperation, actually bundled him—"neck an' crop," as

she afterwards said—out of the house, giving him a final headlong thrust at the threshold. At that he might have got away. But unfortunately for him, Amariah caught sight of a handy pail of water, which she snatched up and emptied over his back.

It was an ignominous ending to so great an adventure; even Pinch Jellie felt that, in a way. And when an indignity found its way through to his far-off susceptibilities, or a falling-off in his actions became apparent to him, it was a proof that things were very far removed from what they ought to be. Yet there was no doubting around this matter, no going back and brazening it out. He was conscious that he had sinned, "though not so much, either, under the circumstances," was his explanation to himself. He had to recognise that Amariah was unduly aroused; and, despite the fact that she could not stand by quietly and see another suffer when her own "blood wasn't up," she was in the habit of using her "ten commandments" rather freely on such occasions—to his certain knowledge. Hence he kept his saddened, almost sodden, progress towards the village; seeing no beauty in that starry night, wondering at a few things which had transpired since sundown, feeling shaken and sore, making shrewd guesses at who the practical jokers were and thinking how he would get even with them; but otherwise indifferent as usual, now that he knew—as he felt he did—that no harm had been intended to him. His main idea was that Abe had heard of his visits to the Hall Farm, seen the real reason of them, had become jealous and had organised this attack upon him. Of course, as most of us do, Pinch argued from what *he* would have done under the same circumstances. However, he reflected, he was "getting his own back, as this mighty clever farmer would find out by-and-bye, when he came to discover that his pet idea of a village institute wasn't the village's at all." Pinch, who felt a new satisfaction

in the duplicity he was playing, nearly chuckled at the thought of how he would score in the end.

On her part, Amariah stood there, throwing a plenitude of scornful opinions and other severe criticism at him, as he went out of the mill-yard and up the road. Whether the night and disinterested persons heard her or not she had no care. But when he was out of sight, and her invectives were thinning down in quantity if not in quality, she was about to turn back into the house, when who should come around the corner towards the fields and the "Saltings" (opposite to the way in which Pinch Jellie had gone) but her father and Corporal, just back from their poaching. Nor was Jonas surprised at seeing her there. In fact, it was a rare thing to see the imperturbable miller show surprise at anything. He knew his daughter, as should be known by a father whose domestic arrangements were under the tyranny of one. Hence he merely said,

"So, you're back."

"Yes," she answered, as casually as her dying "flare-up" would allow.

"M-m, thought as equatorially much.—Get inside."

And in they went, where Amariah made her parent a business-like peace offering in the shape of a pound of his favourite tobacco; then, whilst preparing and eating a readily provided supper, she tendered such explanations as she thought the occasion needed. And from that hour their old conditions were resumed.

A NUT-BROWN MAID AND A CONSOLATE SHEPHERD

A NUT-BROWN MAID AND A CONSOLATE SHEPHERD

"WHAT glorious weather, just!—Don't you think so?"

This was between two and three weeks after the mill "joke," when the ironical question, "Who tied you to the mill-sail, Mr. P. J.?" was now and then asked him, and he was still ferreting around to make sure who had used him so cruelly. In fact it was yet early in spring; but the weather was summer-like.

"But it is just splendid!—Isn't it?" Lucian repeated, determined to arouse some brightness in her if possible.

"Yes,—sometimes," 'Ola replied, with a long pause between the two words; and involuntarily putting a dejected, wistful and not entirely resigned tone into the second one, as she took a few steps further and halted almost level with him.

He was standing by the willows near the duck pond, looking back at the house and thinking that certain parts of it needed paint and whitewash; and that they would have had their usual renovating ere now but for those "distractions" and projects which were claiming more and more of the time and bad temper of his friend. For the tie between the two men had now so far squeezed acquaintanceship out of the matter that Abe generally addressed the younger man as Lu'.

'Ola, after seeing her father off to Witham market —in the reverse of a marketing humour, because of some new "difference" with Tamar—had strolled along towards Lucian, rebellion in her heart and tears not far from her eyes. Not that Tamar ever directly assailed *her* peace. On the contrary, neither was it Tamar's na-

ture nor habit either to interfere or to find fault with 'Ola in any manner. In domestic matters they simply went their own ways, each one having drifted into taking upon herself the responsibility of an allotted set of tasks and of leaving each other quietly to that responsibility. Hence there was never friction between them. But this growing habit of Tamar's, in quietly treating Abe as a perverse husband or an elder brother who badly needed the shaping influence of a feminine hand, and who must have it whether he would or not, was becoming too much for 'Ola as well as for her father—whom she blamed at times for "putting up with it," even when she dreaded, in a sense, the eruption that she knew "must come out of one of these upsetting interferences;" the most of which she had to guess at by certain happenings, because she saw but little of them in reality. In a curious way, yet chiefly because of her inflexibility and persistency, Tamar always seemed to be stumbling against the hard side in him; and this in spite of his natural emotion and of their mutual past, a fact that angered Tamar secretly and made her all the more persistent.

Lucian looked at 'Ola keenly for fully a minute, knowing what the ache was and why; but ignorant of all that had gone before and laid the foundation of Tamar's being one of the household. To him the silent sort of woman was "just a friend of the family;" and to that family of father and daughter he was far too loyal either to think of the possibilities of the past or to seek to know. Sometimes 'Ola wondered if he guessed at the truth (as she was sure Mercy did; but Mercy had a good heart in her), dreaded lest he should, then put the idea from her as something that could not be mended by worrying. Undoubtedly this matter had brought about a sort of sympathetic link between them; a link that had been strengthened by daily intercourse; by the thousand little things of intimate life, by a similarity of tastes and

dispositions; and, not least, by an admiration which she was not always careful to hide.

They exchanged a few more remarks, during which 'Ola despondently said that they were in for a spell of bad luck, or the only black lamb of the season would not have died. To this he replied,

"Come now, let's figure it out like this—you're out of sorts; forget this affair and all about it, and go up to the village and see Mrs. Briggs or some other level-headed person, and have a square, lively talk. That will set you right."

"Mrs. Briggs! I feel more like going off for a day's don't-care!" was the rebellious answer.

"Do you, now? Jove, will you come?"

"Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere—over the hills and far away!"

"Yes, come along!—Let's have a 'ranty' to-day!" And, with her eyes now full of vivacity, she made to go.

"What's that?" he queried, moving with her.

"What?"

"A 'ranty'?"

"Oh, a game.—I'm desperate. It's what the children say up north when they're going to have a see-saw."

"I see. But won't you—shall you go like this?" He indicated her attire—a holland frock, bib-apron and a washable sunbonnet.

"Yes.—Why not?"

"But if it rains?"

"Don't care! I tell you I'm desperate!"

And so they went, possibly for an hour or two, past the willows and the pond, through the paddock, over a meadow and into a lane that led away across the high-road and towards the river. This was the way he wanted to go, because it was the way he had traversed with an amateur yachtsman (whose acquaintance he had made in London) during the previous summer; on which occasion

he had first seen her in the village, when he and his friend went up there for provisions.

"What do you want to go there for?" she inquired, turning aside and pursuing her own way, in the sure knowledge that he would follow.

"Oh, just a little sentiment. I like the place." He remembered his first visit there and wondered if it would be wise to hint at the reason of his affection for the place.

"Sentiment? Why, I thought America was too busy making dollars to think of such a thing."

"Believe me, there's more sentiment, just in the States than there is in this barnacled little kingdom of yours," he rejoined lightly.

"Barnacled?"

"Well, I mean sea-washed, you know." And he laughed.

"Well, whether old England is 'barnacled' or not, I wouldn't live in your *States*—not if they're half what I've read about them!"

"It's precisely the finest country that Nature ever made and left for man to finish," said he, with some regret at the "barnacled."

"And he's finishing it badly, indeed, by all accounts."

"I guess you're just in for criticism to-day," was his smiling comment.

"No. But if you're in for sentiment, I guess we shall get poetry; then I shall criticise." By the "guess" he knew that "barnacled" had been allowed to pass, for it was still her custom, when her heart was light, to tease him anent his "Amuricanisms." Here they arrived at a gate that was chained-up and nailed. "Never mind," said she, gaily; "here's a gap, look."

Thus they continued, while the multitudinous business of the season was carried on around them in the atmosphere of that genial day. It was a time new to Lucian, and wherever he turned he saw beauties that were equally

fresh to him. He heard the robin's gladsome song of spring; she told him what bird it was, and for the first time in his life he understood the meaning of "Oh, to be in England, now that April's there!" He had arisen that morning at the crowing of one of Mrs. Brigg's cockerels, taken it as a good omen for the day, and now felt—he told himself, as they pursued their careless way—that "he had the optimistic enthusiasm of the Wild West wind in his veins." It was glorious to be young—and in love; in love with such a beauty, such perfection, such charm and grace! Even her "moods" were an attraction, where a dull sameness would have been monotonous. It is wonderful what blemishes a true lover will construe into virtues! Only your partial lover sees faults at all. So went nineteen and twenty-three, whilst that dark speckled thief of the cherry orchard, the starling, flew across their path in his search for the awakening larvæ of insects; while tits and nuthatches hurried and quarrelled about their haunts of the previous year, and martins hopped near ponds and ready marshes, wagging their long tails up and own; while the blue plumage of the wild dove gleamed in the sunlight, and red-shanks made for the marshes; while the sedge-warbler, unlike any other bird, sang the louder as they approached, as if to say—see what a fine songster I am; while the strong imperative note of the missel-thrush, crying "Get-up, get-up, get-up!" came down from the tall elms—that particular tree of East Anglia—to mingle with the general melody of the hedge-row choristers; while the buds of the ash, now no longer black, maple, oak, thorn opened to their annual work of dressing the bare black boughs; and Lucian saw interest in every item of the whole, asking information here and giving it there. And so, onward they fared, careless of the hours, heedless of the ground they covered, indifferent, apparently, as to whither they went; he gathering here a violet and there

a delicate dog-rose for her to wear. She, without a thought of guiding their course, was the waypicker; he just bore her company, as he would have done if he had suddenly found her climbing Jacob's ladder or starting open-eyed and unafraid down that incline up which Orpheus drew Eurydice with his melody. Now a ten minutes' idyll on grassland, in their free, fair comradeship and sane talk, while lambs made a play-ground of the daisied sward about them; now a heart-filling sight as they swung easefully along the side of a turnip-field, childlike telling each other what pleased them and what did not; everything behind them forgotten, everything of the future understandingly ignored; he humming a snatch of song here and there, sometimes in direct answer to a remark of hers, then at her imperative command not to be "so silent;" at others as a mere expression of feeling, such as when he trolled out—

"Here sit we on this shady bank,
  Whilst all the world goes by—
Time, brazen wealth and chances rare;
  Yet naught care you or I.

"These blooms we pick; their petals fall—
  The world goes hurrying past;
It has no time to see what joy
  We find in being last—
It has no time, it has no time,
  To see what joy, to see what joy
We find in being last. . . ."

She, on his left, was looking steadily at him, out of the corners of her eyes,—a look that was full of questioning but with no apprehension of any kind. His gaze was fixed, ahead and to his right, at a black-cap that perched on a hazel twig and was filling the air with such a rich and passionate love-song that Lucian envied him his freedom of expression.

Presently they arrived at a gate opening into a warm

meadow, just within which she threw herself on the grass, saying, "I'm hungry—get me a turnip."

He wanted to go off to a farm, a couple of fields distant, and bring her something more in the way of ordinary food; but she would have her imperious will obeyed, and he did as he was bidden. When she saw what he had in hand, a white turnip, she bade him "take it back and bring a swede—she didn't want that savourless thing." And when he had peeled the juicy, orange-coloured one with his pocket-knife, he cut her a slice from the heart of it, took one himself, and they ate in silence—bathed in sunlight, flooded with bird-harmony and too full of thoughts for talk. Enthusiastic acolytes in that best of all religious, love, what need had they for "declarations?" Their manifestos had been said by eyes and acts a thousand times already, at least a thousand on his part; and as many times received, if not actually signed, in silent pleasure by her. It was love's feast by the wayside; by the hedgerow that was humming faintly with new life, typical of them and what they felt. And she made it sweeter by showing him, as she had first taught him how to rub an ear of wheat and blow the chaff away, how to scrape the heart of their "love apple" so as to yield nothing but juicy pulp. It was the sweetest meal that Lucian ever remembered to have ate. Humble? It was not humble to him. He was a prince at a feast that love sanctified and made glorious. Then he took his cap, gathered it full of primroses from the bank behind them, sat down again and began to weave her a chaplet of the flowers.

Bye-and-bye she said, "Why don't you talk?— You seem to have lost your tongue all of a sudden."

"Do I, just? Well, let's tell tales—I don't know any; but I'm a jolly good listener. And I can laugh. Laugh? Why, I'd laugh to-day against any man in Christendom!'"

"Don't be silly!"

"Well, what do you think of Miss Chapman?" This was the parson's sister, who had been some two months at the Rectory and had gone much to the farm, because of a liking she had conceived for Tamar.

"I should say she's a lady of no enterprise."

"Why?"

"Because she's thirty, if she's a day, and has never yet had a lover."

"I guess that's hard. But perhaps she's not an Eve."

"Eve?—no. . . . If I were Eve in the garden, do you know I would have that apple?"

"Would you?" And he laughed aloud; then dropped the chaplet on her head, saying "wear that."

"Don't be silly!" She took the flowers in her hand, adding: "Yes; and there isn't a woman of spirit alive who wouldn't. Just fancy what a dull life she would make of it for want of a little courage!" He rolled on the grass, laughed again, sat up and took out a cigarette. "But, I say, why are you wasting your time in learning to be a farmer?"

"Because I've seen the vision splendid," he replied, filling the balmy air with smoke.

"Now you're up in the clouds again. But tell me—because, you know, you're not in love with it, although you're fond enough of a simple life—in a way." One question that often occurred to 'Ola was: Had he really become poor, or was he acting a fib for his purpose? This was what she would have liked to ask him at the moment; but it was too personal a query as yet.

Taking the cigarette from his mouth, he answered slowly, "Love? Love is life's operetta mostly, its opera sometimes; and I have come upon one of the grand order, I guess."

"Mind, you'll be having Mr. Cawpkin calling on you again," said she, teasingly. This matter—which Madoc

had not been foolish enough to carry any further, although he still "paid attentions" to 'Ola whenever the opportunity was there—had reached her ears in oddments, but enough for her satisfaction—for 'Ola was one who never troubled about unimportant details.

"But, come, tell me," said she, looking at his frank face and incidentally picking the chaplet to pieces, "Now—because, you know, you'll have to—why do you go on wasting your time like this?"

Throwing the half of his cigarette into the hedge-bottom, he turned towards her a face that was now serious and set with deep feeling; and, leaning sideways on one hand, some four feet away on her left, he asked in a quiet, low tone, "Do you love me?"

"What's that to do with you!" she inquired, opening her splendid eyes to their widest, and appearing as if the question was the last thing she had expected on earth.

"Well, I guess it has a pretty deal to do with me."

"No, it hasn't!"

"Pardon me, some,—it has."

"I say it *hasn't!*"

"Believe me, 'Ola, it has, just precisely it has."

Heedless of this being his first time of addressing her by her christian name, she replied sharply, "Then you're a failure!"

"Why?"

"Is it any business of yours whether I love you or not?"

"I figure it that it is—just all my business," he rejoined, still in that quiet tone of deep feeling.

"Then you're a failure because you don't know your own business best, as every successful man does—there!" And up she leapt, laughing merrily to herself and trying to hide it; but in vain, and he made a dash to seize her. "No, you don't!—Now, I shall be cross if you

do!" He had not touched her as yet; and he paused, doubtful, fearing to offend or in anywise to break the charm of the moment, which he felt was being snatched from the hands of the gods and was too precious to be lost in an effort at satiety. "Now, come along, and don't be silly, just. As I told you before, I'm out for a 'ranty' to-day; and if you spoil it, I guess I shall be just angry right away. So keep those serious things for serious times. Look there," she added, with an abrupt return to sheer gaiety "gather some of those cowslips—'paigles' they call them down here and—I'll make you some 'paigle' pudding when we get home, really I will! It's not uncommon, and it's quite a nice delicacy."

And away she turned and went on, the spoiled chaplet in her hand; he obeying her command till his hands were full of the yellow flowers; then back at her side, seeing that she was still in her tantalising mood, and finding himself in a large degree quite satisfied. "Besides, you know," she resumed, "I've told you before—yes, that night, in the house, after the cards, before you went away,—after the harvest supper." And a curious expression, a sort of questioning remembrance, flitted across her face as she turned it suddenly towards him.

"What?" queried he, knowing what she meant.

"That I shall only be a farmer's wife, and cut off the tails of blind mice. And *you* won't be a farmer—I *know* you won't,—you're only wasting your time; and a young man who wastes his time—well, you can guess what father would say."

From this point she deftly kept the conversation on him and his projects, but only learnt what she already knew—that he purposed being a farmer and spending his leisure time in literary pursuits, his ambition being to become "a Moreland of the pen and writing of a life where the primer of Nature came near to being the whole grammar of existence."

"Whilst I've been down here I've figured it out in this way," he added—"It doesn't matter a cent whether the thing be song or story, tune or creed, that which went to the heart has lived; while the thing that appealed to the brain only is mostly dead as the hands that wrought it. Anyhow, that's precisely my conviction; and I guess I'll give it a good show presently."

"And I believe you will succeed!" And she flashed on him one of those deep lightning-like glances of hers, which came in an instant and were gone again, often before the subject realised their presence, always before they were half-understood. "And now, look here, go over to that farm—fetch us some milk and whatever you can get to eat. I will wait for you here." She pointed to a broad, placid brook close by, on the banks of which there were clusters of trees and shrubs. "We must have a meal of some sort, you know, then be getting home again."

At that she turned aside to the stream, seemed to be occupied with some serious thoughts, which she endeavoured to hide by humming an air; but it came in such disjointed snatches, and out of tune at times, as only partially to serve its purpose. He noticed these things and obediently went his way.

When he returned, which was very quickly, laden with the cold half of a chicken, milk, cheese, bread, butter and some spring salads, besides the necessary "gear"—he could see nothing of 'Ola. He put down the basket, at a spot where he thought she must have arrived on the bank of the stream, for there lay the discarded chaplet of limp primroses, along with the cowslips, and he looked right and left and wondered. Had he better search for her, or wait there?

He lit a cigarette, left the provender and strolled along the bank of the stream, as if all the world were his and he had no desire to sell a single plot. At the end of

some hundred and fifty yards of this meandering, and after several looks back to see that the luncheon was still in safety, he came to a sort of bay in the stream and began to circle around the thorns and brambles which nearly encompassed the place. Before he had quite passed the dense growth he heard a splashing in the water, but took no notice of the matter, beyond a casual thought that some cattle had got into the stream from the opposite meadow. Then he arrived at an opening in the bushes and stood stockstill. There was 'Ola in the stream, bare to her knees almost, her skirts held up in both hands, a span of white shapely limbs between the top of the water and the hem of her clothes, she sideways on to him and looking down at the brook as it ran quickly past. It was a pleasing and a natural sight; it was truly English, too. That fairly tall and well-made figure, in its plain print frock that set it off so finely; the carelessly worn sunbonnet; the flesh-tint below, in part cut off by the limpid water; the easy grace in which she held her clothing up; the piquant poise of her head; the profile of a face where the charm was a blending of vivacity, colouring and contour of feature; the mirroring brook, just there some five and twenty feet wide, across which the noonday sun threw alternating shafts of light and shadows of trees and shrubs; the fresh greens of midspring all around, and the two meadows dipping gently to the stream. To a lover the sight was fascinating. To a poet-lover it was one to set Pegasus on a wild flight after unrequiting sonnets and lyrics. What, then, was it to one of Lucian's kind?—where such a love of nature, rhythm and colouring went hand-in-hand with robust health, a sane outlook and the devotion of a strong heart. Diana at her sylvan bath would have been infinitely more voluptuous, but without that infinity of modest charm which characterised 'Ola as she stood there momentarily. For it was only a moment or so ere

their glances met. He was just turning on his heel, almost without pausing, to go back to the luncheon—to creep quietly away from this ever-to-be-remembered vision of loveliness and simple grace, remembered in secret only, and brought back for happy contemplation both in gladness and in sorrow. At that instant 'Ola, with the instinctive knowledge which is common to all of us when we feel, yet do not see, the presence of another person, raised her head towards him, and their eyes met; her first recorded impression being, to his credit then and thereafter, that he was turning away from her. Embarrassed, confused as they both were, neither of them knew exactly what to do. But she, womanlike on such occasions, was the first to regain a forced semblance of composure, and said, in gay bravado,

"Oh, you can come along now,—you have seen me; so it's no use either of us blushing and hiding." He saw clearly that the whole of her face had suddenly acquired a deeper hue. "And as you've seen me, I'm not going to cut my pleasure short." He went forward, losing his diffidence as she rounded the tiny bay. "I didn't think you would be back so soon as this. And, you know, you ought to have waited where we parted." By this time she had waded into shallower water and lowered her skirts nearly to the face of the brook.

"But you might have been lost, some, or gone an hour or two."

"It doesn't matter, you ought to have waited—even if I had been gone all day. The faithful knight always kept his vigil if it was days or weeks. But come and have a paddle—it's deliciously cool!"

"Well, I guess I'm right there for that invitation."

So they paddled together—up the stream and down the stream; he ever on the deeper side of 'Ola; she holding to shrubs and steep grassy banks; both of them talking merrily of unimportant nothings. And the world was

fresh and young and sweet, because they were the world; neither of them faultless, yet both of them typical of the best of their kinds—she of her country and her sex, he of his nation and its manhood; she an opal on humanity, he one of its diamonds yet with a fair soft lustre in certain lights; she the outcome of a social régime, grown hoary in usage, and loved by her for its venerableness yet rebelled against at times,—he a product such as could only come of a modern cosmopolitan country in a state of transition and formation, or from one of the old-time nations of song and sword and compliment. It was a time that would be recollected when Memory should unseal the chambers that sorrow and strenuous doings would close and seal, and draw curtains from windows out of which after events were to shut the light of happiness. So they splashed quietly, heedlessly along; their yesterday forgotten, the morrow unheeded; the philosophy of youthful happiness, "This hour is all time," their sole consideration and even that not considered—till 'Ola trod on a sharp-edged stone; and, lo, the goddess was a woman in pain, and the god was merely human.

He wanted to carry her out of the brook; of that she would have nothing. He helped her to the bank, as quickly as limps would allow. He asked to look at the injured spot—he knew something of binding up cuts and bruises, had passed examinations in First Aid. For reply he was bidden to fetch her boots and stockings, "right away." When he returned with them, she was finishing wiping her feet with her big apron; and quickly tucked them under her skirts, out of sight.

He went back to the provender, there put on his footwear; and she presently followed him, limping slightly. At the end of the meal, when she was absently toying again with the damaged ring of primroses, he said,

"I have something here that I would like to read to you a little.—May I?"

"Yes—'a little.' Is there much of it?"

"No. You'll excuse me, I hope; but there's just a bit of explanation to make first."

"Very well,—cut it short, please."

"It's just this: It seems to me that there's always a male and a female element in poetry; that is the brown meat of the strong and rugged, and the white of the delicate and refined. And, I take it, each one gets a show in its turn, and is a pretty good gauge of the intellectual feeling of its time."

"Is that all?"

"No. I've tried to show this in my verses, and more."

"What?"

"This—that you stand for my White Maiden, and I for the Brown Youth."

"Indeed." But her effort to speak in a commonplace tone was a failure. Under both it and her manner there was an apparent, growing interest.

"Yes.—Listen,—the Brown Youth says:

"'Virile and free, mark how my lusty arms
Swing pendant-like across the face of time—
Ay, swing in cadence new, as I am new to men,—
New in my second birth; for long ago,
Ere gliding, soft effeminate rhyme was known,
When history told herself in legends tongued,
Men knew me well and used me to their ends.

Now come I fresh into thy fields, to sow
And reap with thee, and woo thee, gentle maid.

Swinging abroad to the rhythm I make,
Loose in my garments and long in my stride;
Lunged to the full where I stalk and take,
Filled with the glamour of life and its pride;
Springing along to the passions I feel,
Optimist spurred by the youth in my heel!
Hear me and have me to work in thy field;
I am the strength that thy sickle can wield!'

"Then the White Maiden says:

"'Afeared I am, O Youth so strong,
That you will work me from the field;
Your scythe's so sharp, your stride so long,
I cannot do but yield.
You love the garish light of day;
I seek the rose-soft twilight hour;
Reap you the corn and make the hay,
And I will reap the flower.

Sing you the battle-song of life—
Yours are the eyes that flash at dawn;
Be yours the martial drum and fife,
The lust of thew and brawn.
I love the chastened, classic line,
Soft contemplation of far things;
Those airy metaphors are mine
That lurk in fairy rings.

You strike the organ-notes of stress—
My lute is small and silver-stringed;
Your cosmic force mankind should bless—
My thoughts are zephyr-winged:
You are the power; I beauty am;
Take you the field, the grove be mine;
Slay you the ox, I wreathe the lamb—
Two halves of one divine.

Two halves we are, yet cannot join;
You hold aloft a flaming torch,
Are brave and clarion-tongued; I coin
Fair thoughts in Life's dim porch.
You tread the press and drink its wine;
My draught's a purling woodland stream;
Go you to live and work and shine—
I go to muse and dream. . . .'"

"Yes, it is very beautiful. . . . But——" She jerked her contemplative gaze from the stream to his face, put out her hand, adding, "give it to me."

He gave her the paper, saying, "But what?" She was reading his lines. . . . "What's the 'but,' please?"

"Your allegory."

"How?"

"About you and me."

"I guess I'm dense."

"You seem so. And yet it's true the other way."

"Just put me wise a minute."

"See what your White Maiden says—you go 'to live and work and shine,' I go to muse and dream."

"Oh, but that——"

"This is where your allegory is true."

"You're a mighty tease, just. But, say, do you think that's good enough to keep?"

"I'm going to keep it."

"Then you think it's poetry?"

"What is poetry?"

"Fine clothes, I guess, for common things."

"That's American. I should say poetry is to clothe the nakedness of common thoughts in a way that makes them both beautiful and uncommon."

"And that's precisely English," said he, laughingly.

"Don't imitate. But why is nearly all modern poetry so sad?"

"Just this, I take it—most modern poetry is due more to indigestion than to inspiration, especially the middle class quality. It's only here and there that a man seems to write from a healthy stomach."

"Then you think that the world is ruled by its stomach and not its brain?"

"Yes and no—the stomach rules the world through the brain. As your father says, tea has ruined the digestion of Europe, and we're suffering from this yellow invasion, which is turning us yellow. If I had my way I would burn every pessimistic book in the world, and make it a death penalty to write another."

"Because they are heretical to your creed."

"Yes, and because they check the world's general advancement. May I smoke?"

"Don't ask. But, haven't I heard you say that there can't be life without tragedy?" she asked, falling into his serious humour.

"That's so."

"Well, every tragedy in print must have some pessimistic influence on some minds."

"Got me. But there are so many pessimistic books that are not tragedies. Look at novels—for every good comedy of life we just get a few hundreds that are tragically dull imitations of life."

"But is it easier to write tragedy than comedy?"

"That's so again—of such as we get. And again it isn't so."

"Tying yourself in a knot again."

"No, I guess I'm running straight."

"Show me."

"This way—the art of real tragedy, I figure it, is so simple, direct and inevitable that a broad road winds to it through the inequalities and inconsistencies of human nature as it struggles with the circumstances that we call fate. But the art of comedy is so subtle, so far off and difficult to come at that much continued effort and knowledge of its whereabouts are needed to get there."

"Then it's your opinion that we are a long way from having any immortals now?—as there are no real tragedies being written and comedy is so difficult."

"Oh, no. Take my word for it, there are immortals around us now, in their ways; only we lack the aloofness and the proper perspective necessary to see them. But I guess there's a plentiful lack of imagination to-day."

"Do you?"

"Yes. It's just on the top to me that imagination is

the salt of the literary mind, and when it bodies forth the truth, either in real tragedy or pure comedy, it is the essence of mentality and the core of immutability."

"The imagination of a Goldsmith, a Cervantes, a St. Pierre, a Defoe or a Dickens?" said 'Ola, who was sometimes a little proud of the rather wide reading through which she had wandered, first at her father's instigation then at her own inclination.

"Yes; but I guess that Dickens's genius of that sort would go the round of the others—it ran to bucketsful, not to condensed drops of brilliancy. He just worked in jasper rather than in diamonds."

"And what of his imitators?"

"Every master has them, some—that is every successful original; and some of them are deft enough to catch a trick or two of the master, but none are sufficiently clever to obtain more than a touch of his mastery."

"How long have you been studying these things?" she queried, with a tendency to change the serious mood.

"Longer than farming."

"So I guess. Is it what you and father talk about so much when you are shut up together in the study?"

"Some—sometimes. But it's my notion that a greater literary sinner than the imitator is the one who creates a difficulty then shirks it; and there's plenty of them to-day."

"Does it annoy you much?"

"Well, now, is it sport to set up a fence then refuse to try the jump?"

"Father would say no; but he's a hard critic."

"Yes; but he's just and he knows, and if he doesn't he tries to put no man wise; and that's more than you can say of the critics to-day—generally."

"What's the matter with them?—finish and let us be going home."

"We can talk as we go along."

"Yes; but I figure that we will change the subject when we start. Now."

"You're a vandal, just——"

"Breaking up the ornaments of the lecture—and unrepentant, too." And she laughed. "Well, never mind—hurry along."

"Well, look at the things we read that are called criticism——"

"Abominations."

"That's so, just." He was determined that her frolicsome turn of the moment should not put him "off the track." "Look how often we see the accepted writer or painter or musician quietly allowed to do things which the new or unknown one is sharply criticised for attempting, whatever his powers in that direction may be. "I'm on the side of the gods, anyhow; and I say the man who is to be a judge of grinding flour must be a miller and know everything in the mill. If you admit the character, then you must allow both the thought and the happening—so I figure it. And who shall say what notes there are not in the long gamut of humanity from a Buddha to a Nero, from a Messalina to a Joan of Arc? Critics won't see—they haven't the insight——"

"Then why blame them?"

"To see that in all art there is some practicality, just, as there is in all Nature; which art more or less pictures, with certain 'improvements,' but often caricatures only."

"Mind, you're forgetting your creed."

"We want the beauty, the imagination, the allegory, but on their faces they must carry their solutions in these days, kindly and simple to all, or simple in their tragic directness. We have to run as we read in these times, anyhow."

"I say."

"Yes."

"Father is making you too much of a talker. I'm sure you won't be a farmer."

For reply he leapt to his feet, laughed heartily and said, "Come,—I guess we'll be moving."

Then the basket and "gear" were returned to the farm, and they began their homeward journey, the cowslips left forgotten. Soon it became plain that the injured foot was painful; but 'Ola would admit of no help. Then her brightness went. Tired, limping and rather apprehensive of things at home, she became a little perverse. Yet he bore with her, comfortingly. By the time they arrived at the home paddock the idyll had been a couple of hours too long; it was soiled as was the chaplet, which she carried indoors. Instead of being short enough to leave a desire for more, it had reached satiety with her; but it was a satiety that would hardly outlast her weariness.

BOOK III

FULL BARNS AND PROSPECTS

FROST ON THE LAND

In the village it was generally said of Pinch Jellie that "he had no more heart than a 'bolted' cabbage." True, he was incapable of either wrath or pity in any strong form. But his fear and such wells of anger as were his had been so far stirred by the windmill "joke" that, while suspecting Abe to be at the bottom of the matter, he had ferreted around in order to discover who had really committed the outrage on him. This urging to retaliation on some one was done by his offended dignity; his position as "a man of independent means" and as "the Rector's secretary" (for Mr. Chapman's absences from home, and the fact that Mrs. Chapman was seriously ill during some of his time, had played largely into Pinch's hands); and by that self-admiration of which he had so large a share as to make even charitable Miss Scopes speak of it disparagingly. Witness his recent call on Abe, as to the Institute affairs. There happened to be a hanging mirror in the room, and so much had it occupied Pinch's attention, that Abe had presently hung a cloth over it, saying, —"There, now, I think, you'll be able to fix your mind on the business." Then Abe laughed; never dreaming that behind Pinch's non-committal smile there was the thought that he was all the time "getting his own back," as Abe was to understand all too well when his beloved Institute became a public matter. At the end of the interview he had deepened the sting by smilingly remarking, "You ought to have been a decorator of looking-glasses, you know, Mr. Pinch Jellie; then you could have looked at yourself all day."

From this new insult to his love of appearance the

dandy had gone home, to be again greeted in the village by that occasionally repeated jocular remark, "Who put you on the mill-sail, Mr. P. J.?" which had once more stirred his natural desire for retaliation, reminding him of the prominence that would be his as a punisher of the guilty. But this ferreting out the wrong-doers had been a very slow piece of work. His own sly ways of proceeding had perforce been doubled in this affair—first, because his object was to make sure of the right persons, while appearing to treat the affair as one of no account; and the second reason was owing to his sheer inability to make headway. Go where he would, do his "pumping" never so artfully, and Ulysses could not have been much more cunning over the matter than he was, he could not gain any certain information. It appeared as if the whole village was leagued to keep him from knowing the truth. To attain this end he had given an extra guinea each to the cricket club and the football club, had "stood the incidentals" of a "smoker" at the King's Head and a "domino tournament" at the Hare and Hounds, had gratuitously mended and cleaned every recalcitrant clock in the place—or, at least, such as he could get his hands on, for his "mending and cleaning" had now become pretty well known—yet all to no definite purpose. He could do no more than guess at the identity of those who had "almost frightened the last breath out of him."

The truth was that, with a possible visit to the magistrates as their incentive, Simons and his confederates had so well-preserved their secret as to prevent anyone from being sure who had done the thing. Besides, Pinch Jellie was too much disliked at heart for any of the villagers to have helped him in such a matter. In all the place he had not a real enemy, and he was one who would go through life without making a friend. To ninety per cent. of the persons about him he was an alien who, for one reason here and another there, could never be ad-

mitted to the freemasonry of rural exclusiveness, and particularly not to that peculiar barring-out secretiveness of East Anglian peasantry; one whom no one took seriously, and especially not the plodding serious poor, who persisted in treating him the most off-handedly of all, it was his continual light hurt of mind that he could not make a serious impression anywhere. If there was one thing for which he was heartily disliked, it was the one that he could not see was damaging to him. This was his passion—for it had now grown to be something of that nature—for getting possession of land and houses in the village; even to the extent of far outbidding any other intending buyer and of sometimes paying more than the real value of the purchase, thus putting a "fancy" value on such things generally. In fact, he had recently done this in respect of some cottages, which three small holders wanted to buy on a scale of rent-payments, and would have got but for Pinch Jellie. Then there was his attempt, immediately after the "joke," to buy the Hare and Hounds, the only "free" house in the district, over Mrs. Moriety's head; and was only stopped by the widow, in conjunction with Mrs. Briggs and Jonas, exercising her option on the inn. His light excuse in each case was, "oh, it's only a matter of business—no harm meant; all's fair, you know, in love and business." But this had not saved him from upbraiding and some addition to the general light dislike in which he was held. Unseen by him, because of those counter-acquired "business" ways which had become a part of himself and blinded him to the ability of other persons to see them and him in a light different from his own, he quite failed to perceive that these two house-acquiring efforts of his, added to the fact that Wade had been sent to prison for three years, had tended considerably to keep him in the dark as to who had played the "joke" on him.

But now, he told himself, he was "going to get his

own back." Knowing Simmons's reputation as a practical joker, having learnt that the rick-cloth had been borrowed from the Hall Farm and the sacks from the mill, that Abe's head-horseman was one who could easily get possession of those things and that he had been one of Wade's chums, Pinch Jellie—despairing of ever getting any sure information on the subject—had decided to take the bull by its horns, go to Tamar and swear that Simmons was the ringleader in the matter; and judge of the farmer's share in it by his consequent conduct. As to his intention of going to her, there was a double reason for this. First he felt certain of her sympathy, and through that channel he hoped to get her interest to induce Abe to put some sort of punishment on Simmons without delay; because he knew that after the opening of the Institute Abe would have no more friendliness for him than he had for Abe. The other actuating motive was this: In his early calls at the Hall Farm he had seen just enough of Tamar to make him conceive a sort of passion for her. Her stately movements and rather unusually fine figure had taken so much hold on him as anything could do, outside fine clothes and a "position in the place." Hence he saw in this appeal half an hour, perhaps a whole hour, of close talk with her, her sympathy, a more or less abiding ground of contact with her, and some subsequent proof as to whether or not Abe had connived at the "mill-joke" on him. As to why Tamar had not yet seen this attachment of his: He was known everywhere as a complimentary gallant wherever women of seventeen to forty or so were concerned. At the same time his shallowness, combined with his cunning at hiding his real feelings, had been quite enough to prevent Tamar from seeing the truth of his inclinations. Again, when this "fancy" had asserted itself it was then too late for him to corrupt his duplicity with regard to the Institute donations—he could not play honestly for her favours by for-

feiting his revenge on Abe and that all-powerful desire to be a familiar in the "Rectory circle" (on which Mrs. Chapman had counted so largely at the outset); because the bulk of the money had then been collected on a written understanding that it was "for a church Institute." So he must run the double course and make the most he could of both parts.

It was one fine afternoon when he stepped out briskly, in his mincing way, tricked out in his finest trappings and with the inevitable flower in his button-hole, to the Hall Farm, on his errand of "bringing Simmons to book," but really more for that eagerly desired tête-à-tête. He was lucky in the fact that Abe was away in the fields; more so because 'Ola and Lucian had driven over to Maldon on a shopping expedition;—he on some matter for himself and Abe; and she, glad to visit the little town on a fine day, at the request of Tamar, who had occasion to go but wished to remain at home. Thus Tamar was alone in the parlour, with some fancy stitching and an unpleasant train of thoughts. So that when he left, after more than an hour of conversation, he talking as if he had chapter and verse for all he declared, and the added pleasure of a good cup of tea—he, like all shallow danglers, being a connoisseur in that beverage—it was with so light a heart that he went up the road humming a gay song to himself, careless as to whether Simmons should be "brought to book" or not. His mood was not even affected by a sight of the mill and the recollection of how he had suffered there that night; nor by a flippant remark, as to where he had been gallivanting at that time of day, from Amariah, who happened to come to the front door of her father's cottage as "the Lady" went by. On entering the village he met Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling (whose attitude towards Amariah, after having given that young person a "piece of her mind" on the evil of deceiving her elders, had now grown to be one of silent disdain)

and received a decided snub from her, because of the familiar manner in which he had approached the would-be "Dame," on the subject of the "tray" that she had promised for the "knife-and-fork tea" that was to be given to the villagers at the forthcoming opening of the Institute. Again, when he was unlatching his garden-gate, a voice, from he knew not where but thought he recognised, called out, "What price the mill-sail, Mr. P. J.?" In spite of all, however, he went indoors with a light heart.

Abe was back before the young people returned from Maldon. The truth was, he came in early to tea because of some close work which he had mapped out for that evening in the study, for which reason he went straight there immediately after the meal. But he had not been long in the room when Tamar entered and closed the door behind her.

Abe glanced up from his papers, as she turned placidly towards him. There was a questioning expression in his eyes, and he said, "I'm busy this evening, Tamar. What is it?"

"Oh, not much,—I shall not keep you long." And she sat, stiffly as was her habit on such occasions, in the chair that the Rector had occupied when Abe and his own desires finally persuaded him into the Institute matter. Abe turned half around on his seat by the table and looked at her inquiringly. "It's about Mr. Pinch Jellie," said she, in that habitually quiet tone which was so little indicative of what interest she might have in the subject under discussion.

"What of him?"

"Well, he has found out that Simmons was the ringleader in that outrage on him in the spring."

"The mill 'joke'?"

"Yes; and he thinks you ought to punish Simmons for his share in it."

"M'm, de does—does he?"

"Well, it's natural.—Don't you think so?"

"And what, I wonder, does he think I ought to do to Simmons?—tie him to the mill-sail, or give him a whipping, or what?" And, in spite of the serious mood that had characterised him when Tamar entered the room, he laughed aloud; not one of his former big echoing laughs, but still one that filled the room.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," she commented, reprovingly, that slight fullness on each side of her mouth showing more clearly, as it always did with any increase of anger on her part.

Putting a check on his hilarity he answered, quite ordinarily, "No, you're not a man, Tamar, else you would."

"I think I should be a strange kind of a man to laugh at such an awful experience to another," was the rather severe rejoinder. And it must be remembered that Tamar possessed, as many little actions had proved, a certain general kindness and sense of fairness; but these qualities were saddled with some natural femininity of outlook, hence this interference of hers.

He looked steadily at her and replied, "I wasn't laughing at the experience—I'm not quite the man to laugh at a thing of that sort, any more than I'm the pawky woman in trousers that you seem to want me to be—but at the safe outcome of it all, and at something in the whole business that, perhaps, a woman can't see; or, at any rate, sees differently to what a man does."

"Well," she said, feeling annoyed at the wrong note that had been struck and holding herself blameless in the matter, "I think you certainly ought to reprimand Simmons or punish him in some way for what he has done to Mr. Pinch Jellie."

"Do you?"

"Certainly I do."

"And in what way do you think I ought to do it?"

"Why, by putting him off work for a few days, or something of that."

"Has Pinch Jellie been here to-day?"

"Yes."

"And what's his proof that Simmons had a hand in the affair?"

"I don't know; but he said so."

"Oh, he did.—Did he? Well, in the first place if the dandy wanted me to play the magistrate for him he should have come to me, not to you; and in the second I'm neither Simmons's judge nor am I going to be," and with that he turned again to the table.

"Then you won't do anything?"

"No, I shall not. What Simmons or anyone else does in his own time and apart from me is no concern of mine, and I've quite enough and a little to spare of my own not to meddle in any one else's—in these days," he added, with a significance the purport of which did not reach Tamar's mind. At that moment, and not altogether unknown to her—though she would have guarded him against the annoyance of others—he was then deep in the examination of some experiments in the feeding of particular cattle on certain proportions of oil-cake, mangolds, swedes and his richest meadows in order to get a milk that would make a distinctive cheese of high quality, to be known as "Essex deeps;" because he proposed to make the cheeses deep in comparison to their small circumference. Being here, as in Yorkshire, too far from a railway to compete in the great milk trade—with very bad roads in winter and only a branch line with a poor service of trains—he had bent his intelligence, for some years and with apparent success, to the breeding of a kind of cow that would be a deeper milker than any Dutch cattle, yet with all the quality of a short horn; and he now appeared about to be as successful in cheese producing.

A person of steady persistence that knew nothing of

surrender, and one who very rarely changed her outlook on a matter, Tamar sat upright, not knowing quite where or how to resume the attack. Meantime Abe continued his work on the barley lawsuit; his small stock of patience growing shorter as she remained, because he knew that while she stayed there the subject was not shelved. The curse of some lives, men and women alike, is their inability to adjust their minds to temperamental matters which are not akin to them naturally. But it was not altogether so with Tamar. Curiously lacking in any definite expression of humour, yet with the ability to appreciate it, as was mostly shown when 'Ola or Mercy broached a jest; never slow to do a kindness to any person in affliction, even to a greater extent than mere inconvenience to herself; so little given to talking as to be somewhat deserving of the term "silent woman" (Jonas always spoke of her as "the mute"); at times even gloomy and repressing; the victim of so reproving a manner that most persons did her the large injustice of thinking that she hardly ever spoke without meaning a reproof; quick and deft in her movements though stiff in carriage; efficient in most things to which she put her hand; within certain limits more adaptable than the average woman to physical circumstances, but as unpliable as cast steel beyond that boundary; intuitively or logically disliked by almost every person with whom she had held intercourse during her stay at the Hall Farm; after the first month suspected of being something of what she really was in the family; then by her sheer personality, mental outlook and deportment, accepted as "a particularly respectable friend of the Shuttleworths and a lady;" yet, saddled with all these traits and items of developed temperament, it was a portion of Tamar's life that she should exert, over practically all who had dealings with her, an influence such as many more talented women would have envied. She was aware of this power of influence, had known it well and

been secretly proud of it in the old times; and knew now that, in spite of the great change in herself since the early Yorkshire days, it was still hers. And no one heeded it less than she did, except in one way—it was to her everlasting chagrin in these times that she had no influence over Abe. Ignorant of the cause of this, faced by the blank insurmountable wall of it she stood there, figuratively, gaping and as wildly impotent as her nature would allow—that is she had grown to be coldly persistent in a hundred and one little things of his or matters connected with him, the very mention of which exasperated him, and partially because of her dogging him so on points which were trivial to his life. With his large affairs, except in the matter of the Institute, she seldom attempted to meddle. That was where her sanity saved them both from early and complete wreck. If she only could have brought her mind to open up the period at Scarborough, just prior to and immediately after the birth of their child, and what led up to her taking its life (some three months during which they had not seen each other and hardly a letter had passed between them)—if she only could have gone over this ground, making him believe that she had been in a way temporarily insane, and learning that the misunderstood infanticide, added to this unaccountable and depreciating change in her, was the cause of his altered attitude towards her till at last every scrap of the old glamour was gone; or if he had once thought that his opinion of the child-killing might be wrong, and have put aside his strong and natural distaste to, almost hatred of the subject, asked her a few questions and cleared the air around the matter then much of this upsetting interference, its cause and effect, might have gone in the clearing, and their whole lives thereafter have been different from what they were and were likely to be. Instead of which, seen and weakly cursed in despair by him yet unnoticed by her, they were, at her blind driving and his

temperamental running with the hounds, hurrying headlong down the *via Avernus* of the situation.

Presently she interrupted the rustling of his papers by saying, "But don't you believe what Mr. Pinch Jellie says?"

"There are those who can lie as well as Old Harry can; and, without any bias towards Mr. P. J., I don't think he would be low down in that class."

"You have an awful opinion of the poor man."

"No,—there's nothing awful about it; it's just a common work-a-day opinion, same as some other practical men have about here."

"But it is so disrespectful."

"Respect?" He smiled. "You don't know P. J., Tamar. And then, again, I do respect him—for one thing: It's my opinion that he could tie a knot in the Devil's tail, and that's more than I could, and I've always a certain sort of respect for the man who can do what I can't."

Tamar's annoyance—never a thing that was seen by a flashing glance or shown in quick words—was growing at her inability to sway him, and at his levity in what appeared to her to be a matter that demanded serious consideration.

"But you really don't mean to say that you are going to pass it off like this,—do you?—as if it were nothing?" she questioned.

"It's nothing to me, Tamar; because, whether the little dandy was speaking the truth about Simmons or not, I don't care two straws. It's none of my business, and there's an end to it, as far as I'm concerned. I'm busy."

But that terminating hint was lost on her. There she sat; her very presence becoming irksome to him, because past experience and an intimate knowledge that cannot be properly explained told him what was passing in her

mind, and that so long as she remained there she was as certain to return to the subject as night was to come up when the sun went down. Abe bent over the table, trying to fix his attention on the papers and wishing he had either the rudeness or the moral courage to ask her to leave the room. Being unable to see the matter from a masculine point of view, she thought that he was surely growing to be a man devoid of feeling. At the moment—and this was largely a keynote to her mind—his common and unusual kindness to animals; his generous treatment of his workers, and his great love of young children generally; his too easily espoused championship of the "under dog" anywhere; his night and day working on behalf of his class were all dwarfed by the nearness of this small item, the suddenly acquired magnitude of which was really due to the fact that he refused to act on it from her point of view. Comparatively it was only a little matter, a straw showing how the domestic wind blew; but put by the side of many that had led to "words" between them it was a large affair. Yet what natural tragedy is worse than a clash of temperament where the binding rope is a four-fold one of conscience, sexually inherent bondage, some degree of affection and the sufferance of an accepted punishment? With marriage prior to that cohabitation in the north, and without the terrible ordeal through which she had passed and he as he was before the awful death of the wife set a growing change moving in him, this discovery of their mutual insuitability would have been a slow affair borne because of wedlock; or, seeing that the clash had its mainspring in events which happened out of the adultery and in those parts of their compositions which might otherwise never have come to the surface, it was likely enough that marriage before the cohabitation would have obviated any such discovery. Besides, it was only a one-sided discovery after all; for to Tamar the whole thing consisted

of his stubborn and unreasonable refusal to let her have her way in the little matters appertaining to him.

Presently he turned his head in her direction, wondering if she intended to sit there stiff and statuesque all the evening, because if so he would go up to his bedroom to work. She was looking at him at the moment, straight, set and placid, as she always did during the lulls of a battle with any one. Their glances met, remained fixed for a few seconds, then he turned once more to the table—conquered, outgazed and inwardly fuming at her persistency and at her not being a man so that he could rap out and settle the matter. Feeling? It seemed to him that she had left nearly all her feeling in that "secret fling up yonder," then had dropped the last vestige of it in York prison. At anyrate, she showed mighty little feeling nowadays where he was concerned. But although he did mostly allow some latitude for what she had gone through, he forgot that Tamar had always been very "set" in her opinions and in her outlook generally; not that this was an issue of wide experience, travel, reading and carefully considered judgment. For she was no reader, had never been out of the kingdom, and had spent her life in a small middle-class household till acquaintanceship and hysteria made her a sort of companion to Abe's wife. It was herself; and, unfortunately, it had saddled her with such an utter inability to see hardly any matter from another person's standpoint as to make her unpopular where she would have found herself working on excellent yielding soil. But perhaps the greatest disadvantage that she experienced in life, without knowing it, was her inability to see that she was ever in the wrong. Even her *liaison* with Abe was to her, in her ordinary times more than half-justified by his wife being hardly a wife and by their mutual passion at the time. As to the infanticide—that sealed-up episode so far as she was concerned, of which neither father nor

daughter ever uttered a word or a hint in her hearing and hardly an allusion when she was not there—that was done in a mad moment entirely, and was therefore wholly excusable, much as she regretted the act itself. Conscience, in its finer, deeper aspects—as he saw it—Tamar had but little. According to her mind—that curiously reticent organ of action—the murder of her child had been as fully expiated, both in fact and in mental suffering, as it was excusable under the circumstances. Hence it never entered her head that others saw her in a very different light to that in which she saw herself; in part this was due to her own cast of mind, in part to her being amongst strangers to her past (except those two who should be the last to judge her harshly; and wise, old, silver-tongued Jinglejoy, out of whom a legion of wild horses would never drag anything that was detrimental to either his master or young mistress), and finally to the tremendous change that had taken place in her between leaving the Yorkshire homestead with her unborn child and emerging from the place in which she had paid the legal penalty of her act.

At last, unable longer to bear her presence in such a mood, and knowing that she was likely to break back into the subject at any moment, he said, "You must excuse me, Tamar—I've a lot to get through this evening."

"It seems to me that you are always very busy in these days,—one sees nothing of you except at mealtimes." She forgot the evenings at cards and other relaxations, whenever Lucian came down; and it was not for her to see that she was the main cause of his spending other evenings alone.

Disregarding the incorrectness of her remark, he merely replied, "I can't help that—work must be done."

"Well, do you really mean that you won't say anything to Simmons?"

"I do, and I'll thank you to say no more about it," said he in a changed tone.

There was a few minutes of silence, which she broke, saying, "Miss Chapman and the Rector were here early this afternoon" . . .

"Were they?"

"Yes, and I must say I still think it a shame that you won't agree to the Institute being a church building."

This was her inevitable retaliation, yet not really meant as such; for to do her justice, Tamar was one who would quietly persist to the last possible word, then retire in dignified injury rather than turn to other things in mere retaliation.

Biting his lip, Abe held his peace. This was probably the fortieth time she had, one way or another, raised this ghost of disagreement between him and the Rector, till at last he had grown to look on it as a ghost of a very black order. The fact was that while there lay a considerable amount of honest liking in astute Mrs. Chapman's preference to Tamar, both she, her husband and his colourless sister had worked upon her all they could during the past few months—after finding that 'Ola was implacable in the matter—in order that she should endeavour to persuade Abe to the desired change in his set purpose.

"Such nice people as they are, and such a simple and proper thing for a churchman to do. I do think that——"

"Did they raise that subject again to-day?" he asked sharply, without moving his head.

"Well, yes; and naturally enough, too."

"And bad taste enough, too," he remarked, as before. He had a shrewd idea as to why Tamar had been so welcome at the Rectory of late, and it was not one to soothe his ruffled feelings at any time.

"Bad taste!—in *them!*"

"Yes, in them particularly, seeing how many times I've told the Rector I'll not agree. Bad taste, indeed, —as if 'the cloth' or fine schooling were any proof against it." Remembering past reprovings as to the brusqueness of his manners, etc., her words had a curious suggestion that stank in his nostrils.

"You are in one of your bad humours to-night, I think," said she, in quiet severity.

"I'm always in a bad humour when people want to drive me along a road that I've repeatedly said I won't travel."

"Yes, I don't wonder at people saying you are blunt and willful——"

"And unpolished," he ironically interrupted.

"Yes, unpolished, too."

"Oh, hang it, Tamar, let me be a man first and an ornament afterwards—if I have time and a fancy that way; then I'll keep every hair on my head in its appointed place for you, wear smart ties every day and simper over thin bread and butter and four o'clock tea, —and not till then."

"No, you are too obstinate; and if you would only be reasonable everything might be so pleasant."

"They would be if you didn't try to call the tune so much."

"I don't try to call any tunes."

"Anyway, you're fiddling me one that I can't dance to."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, just what I say."

"I'm sure you are past bearing with sometimes."

"Then don't bear with me."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say," he replied, now looking straight at her —"take the matter in your own hands, you have it, and don't bear with me."

Often as this invitation had been on his tongue he had never before put it into words. During half a minute or so Tamar steadily returned his gaze, then she understood his meaning. Stiffening herself more upright—if that were possible—and drawing herself forward till she occupied only the front half of the chair, a habit that was one of her few outward signs of strong feeling, she said slowly, in a tone and manner both of which bit with decision, "Abe, I won't mince matters—I never did much of that, and this is not the time to. If you take me by the shoulders and put me out, I shall go, because I shall have to. I would not make a scene outside, for them all to talk about. But I shall not go till then." . . .

She did not in the least believe that he meant this; it was only his momentarily angry mood; and she knew, as well as she knew anything, that the leopard would change his spots before Abe put her out of the house. She still hoped to live down that vow—of outlasting the foul weather of things as they were and reaching the peaceful and respectable harbour of things as she would have them be. For after all (and this was a point on which both Abe and 'Ola did her injustice) he was the one man on earth for her. And this withholding of the marriage that she sought and deemed to be her right, only enhanced her desire and her determination to preserve—even if it did not increase the affection that love had left to do duty as its proxy. To Tamar Abe's fine physique; his "fresh" expressive face; his keen eyes, always fearless where men and animals were concerned; the easily seen humane side of him, that made up his softer moments; his mental capacity, and that kind of strength of character which seemed to demand that, be he here or there, he must in some way be at the head of men and things—in her eyes, so quietly observant in certain ways and so reticent in all, these traits went to make him, on broad lines, pretty nearly all that a man

needed to be. His outbursts of temper at small things were not a weakness to her, only an offshoot from that strange stubbornness the starting point of which was unknown to her. And although he had, in a sense, deserted her in her direst hour of need, and had certainly left her to find his half-hidden whereabouts, still she had come back hoping and believing that, if even the foot of her god was but clay, she would find him to be otherwise of good marble. Then had come the shock of discovering that her strong man had been weak enough to make an utterly needless and equally foolish vow to a dying woman who had never done him any good, except to bear him a handsome daughter who was providentially clear of her mother's worst faults. And when she found that he persisted, and apparently intended to persist, in keeping that vow, it was also to discover in herself, along with an inevitable drop from the higher slopes of devotion to the level plain of commonsense affection, a powerful determination to force from him, in her own way, that justice which she considered should be hers. The evil was that, piqued to a sort of jealousy, she had set about her reconquering in the wrong way. Other women ruled their men—look at Mrs. Chapman, etc.—so why could not she? For, to this extent at anyrate, she considered Abe to be hers. Yet he would take hints from, and do things for, other women—she could cite names and instances—which annoyed him when they came from her. But Tamar was too circumscribed in mind to see that—in spite of all his humaneness, his sentiment in gentle times, his love of song and music (concerning which his taste was seen in that oft-spoken remark, "In all your list of modern things there's nothing that can touch me like the old") which often brought tears to his eyes—there was in Abe that touch of the elemental savage which ever went straight to the feminine heart, and particularly to that of the convention-bound woman of

quiet days. Had she been wise enough to take him as he was, as she did in the year of their secret passion, instead of expending so much petty effort in endeavouring to shape him in small ways, according to her altered notions, and therefore to make him what he was not—had she done this, it was in him to have forgotten the bitter keenness of that almost ever-present but never spoken query: "Why did she kill the boy?" And, besides, he was in part to blame for the fact that she so often returned to the charge—to blame because he repeatedly, generally showed, some hours after a "burst-up" and mostly by act rather than words, that he was sorry to the point of "I am guilty" for his hot and inconsiderate language. It was this characteristic, a fairly common attitude of his towards most persons, that gave her the hope of ultimate success in her purpose.

Still looking at him in that straight, level way of hers, she resumed, "Abe, I am the mother of your child; and if it was the child of passion and abandonment, it was yours. And why should you desert the living to please the dead? Surely I am more to you than she is—than her memory is. And why you treat me like this I cannot understand. Really, you seem as if you have lost your manhood sometimes—you are so very different to what you used to be."

It was a long speech for her to make, without a pause, one that only such an occasion as this would draw from her. Rather surprised at its length, he had waited for her to finish, half determining to take her up on the subject of the child, now that she had broached it; but instead of doing so he replied, rather gloomily for him, "So are you, Tamar,—we're both in that box."

"And what woman do you think would not be when she found herself treated as I am, after what has been? You could not treat me worse than you do sometimes if the child had not been yours."

In an instant he was on his feet, his eyes full of anger and his mouth filled with potent questions on this hated subject; when the door suddenly opened and in trooped 'Ola, with a stranger at her heels, Lucian following; her face being full of vivacity, and she exclaiming,

"Father, Tamar, what do you think?—Here is Ben Ramsbottom!"

And while Lucian stood aside quietly, questioningly, rather sheepishly, and instinctively hurt in a curious, slight degree, Ben advanced past his radiant herald to shake hands with Abe and Tamar; both of whom, but each in a different manner, stood aghast at this abruptly arrived witness to those past affairs which were still seething to an ebb in their minds.

WANING SEASONS

WANING SEASONS

I

AUTUMN's reddy-browns were putting summer's greenery out of sight. A year had gone by since the big supper in Abe's black barn. To him it had been a year of marked changes—of growing decrease of pleasure indoors and loss of general virility. In business it was a year of such marked success that he had completed his purchase of the farmstead and much of the land attached to it, and had made arrangements to buy thirty acres of the elder Cawpkin's best freehold pasture land, his intention being to increase his grazing considerably. But, good as things had been generally, there was to be no harvest home at the Hall Farm this season. As to the surprise caused by this announcement: with the exception of a few remarks separately to 'Ola and Lucian, Abe had let it pass and busied himself more closely with his own affairs; knowing well that certain busybodies in the village, the Cawpkins—especially because 'Ola would have no more of Madoc's attentions—and a few others were making "tongue-capital" out of this matter.

Out of the bombshell that had fallen at the feet of him and Tamar, when he left his chair, hard on the subject of the murdered child, there had come nothing worse than a severe but quickly passing fright that it might explode. Briefly, when driving through the village, on their way back from Maldon, 'Ola and Lucian had come upon Ben Ramsbottom, inquiring for the Hall Farm. Elated at meeting, in these dull days, so old a friend and rather favoured suitor to boot, she had told him to "jump up" and was down at the house with him five minutes

later—then suddenly to remember Tamar, and to whisper to him at the doorway, "Tamar is here,—not a word about the past to anyone." Thus it came about that he greeted them both in so ordinary a manner that any observer would have thought the circumstances of the case were quite normal on all sides. Then 'Ola had found immediate occasion to let both her father and Tamar know that she had "spoken to Ben and that they need to have no fear of consequences," the assurance being based on her old influence over Ben. All this was natural enough and easily seen by those who were in the secret; yet it at once placed 'Ola and—not to a less extent but in a different manner—Tamar and Abe in the position of having to "play up" to young Ramsbottom. To an old friend newly come to the district of their adoption, this was quite as it should be, publicly, on the part of the two elders. The unfortunate thing was that 'Ola stood in an entirely separate light. And many a time she "thanked her stars that, much as she liked Lucian (she thought she loved him, but had not reached certainty in the matter), she had not yet become engaged to him"—as everybody expected would be the case any day. With regard to the two rivals —for that was what they had soon become in a quiet way —Ben was on a visit of an indefinite length to some new owner-residents at Down Hall. On his part Lucian had accepted the situation, too conscious, in his optimism, of some superior powers and advantages in the duel; yet at times rather wishing that his "brand and seal had been placed upon the fair document" prior to Ben's appearance, and blaming himself for having so confidentially dallied with the matter during the past summer. Anyhow, he told himself, he was not so foolish as to try his luck in a final throw whilst the opponent remained in sight and in apparently equal favour.

Whether that abrupt appearance of the trio had been for the ultimate good or harm of Abe and Tamar no one

could say. Had they not been interrupted, it was possible, now that she had touched the subject of the child, that Abe would have driven right into it, through it; and scattered the clouds of it by saying hotly what he thought and learning what he did not know. At the same time, such are the curious turns of actuating motive, remark and rejoinder in moments when anger rides break-neck for the gap of sheer expression, it might have been merely a splutter on his part, a few freezing answers on hers, and she left in silent possession of the field—while, as he had done on other occasions, he swore like a mad fool at the furniture upstairs and stamped the floor in a fever of desire for a wild scamper over hedge and ditch. In any case, partly because of their secret reasons for evading the subject and in part owing to the new anxiety respecting Ramsbottom, the subject had not been broached again. As a matter of simple fact Tamar and 'Ola, and Abe in less degree, had occasional cause to be anxious with regard to Ben: that is after the first week or two he—having made a hurried return home and back, seemingly for the purpose of prolonging his stay at Down Hall—began to show a lessening of respect to Tamar now and then, and was even rude to her two or three times; for which reason she was compelled to become even more diplomatic towards him than she had been at the outset.

Thus were matters amongst them when the opening night of the Institute arrived. It stood on land that had been given by "the Squire," much to the pleasant surprise of Abe; who was too busy and ill-tempered to ask any questions when Pinch Jellie had told him of the gift. It was, of course, decorated with flags and was brightly lit with paraffin lamps. In the afternoon the children, who had received a half holiday for the purpose, had been feasted on buns, tea-water, oranges and the like, as a memento of the occasion—all at the cost of "the Squire;" who, it was faintly rumoured, was "about to nurse the

constituency for Parliamentary honours." And now, mostly at the same person's expense, their fathers and mothers were to be regaled with a "knife-and-fork tea." It was for this purpose that the hall was being prepared by so large a staff of "workers" that, as Pinch Jellie had caustically remarked in his light way to Jonas during the afternoon, "less would have done and served the object better." At the head of affairs was Mrs. Chapman, hardly strong enough yet for what she was doing; but who, on account of the previous night's talk with her husband, after he discovered what Pinch had done, was determined to stand by him to the end of this meeting, and to keep him up to her advice to "tell Shuttleworth the truth and leave the rest alone, for the present at anyrate." She had Tamar as a very welcome lieutenant, and her sister-in-law as quietly muddling matters by "trying to be useful." Of course, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling—the giver of a princely £100 and still unknown as "Dame"—was there, as large in person, as important, and as bustling as ever; helping everywhere and doing no good to anyone, not even those on whom she thrust food when she knew they had eaten more than they ought to have done. Then came Mrs. Moriety and the landlady of the King's Head, who had done the catering between them, at "special request," so that there should be no jealousy; Mrs. Briggs, as head of the Kitchen Committee; Miss Scopes and the schoolmistress as General Superintendents at Tables; Mercy, Amariah and a dozen others doing the handwork generally. Indeed, the two organisers had done their task very well; and matters ran quite smoothly, without even the threat of a hitch, except on two or three occasions when Amariah poked her dark, saucy face under the swelling proportions of the big woman's frontage and had the audacity to wink mischievously at the large red face above her. Since that London jaunt there had been a sort of stiff exclusiveness, on the part of Mrs. H.-T.,

towards her young duper; but it was far from being a success, because the would-be Dame was "too much afflicted in the tongue" to refuse to talk to any one who would converse peaceably with her. As for Amariah, she was not really enjoying herself. While going to and fro, she told herself repeatedly that, as this was most likely the last time—for a particular and private reason—that either Mrs. Chapman, the Rector or any of the others would ask her to any of their doings she was going to get all the fun out of it she could.

Meanwhile, Jonas and Jinglejoy stood apart, towards a corner, exchanging opinions and discussing local matters generally. At a recent manorial court the former had been made ale conner for the parish—which was, yet was not, a rather curious position for one who drank no other intoxicant but rum and was said to have his own bottle kept for him on a shelf behind the little bar of the Hare and Hounds. So that Jonas was now "a man in a public office;" and as this was his first appearance at such a gathering since he was appointed, he had, in spite of his stock of quiet commonsense, to carry himself with due consideration of the appointment. Perhaps that was why he tried to limp less, and stood more upright; the bottom of his black beard being on a level with the top of the old man's whitey-grey head, and his low gruff voice sounding in curious contrast to the other's gentle, silvery tones. The subject at the moment was their employer's apparent loss of his former breezy joviality, and Jonas remarked,

"If it gets much worse a week with him'll be about the same as a week in "—and he descriptively pointed his finger downwards, while that dexter eye of his seemed to the trying to get around the left side of Jinglejoy and look at the back of his head.

"That's soa, Joaanas,—that's soa;" and the old man chuckled quietly, as he, too, appeared to be endeavouring to get at the back of the miller with his right eye. In

spirit a wayfarer of the ages, he was but looking in at life's hostelry, enjoying a warm at the fire of its quiet happenings, the while he now and then made its dull stale old rafters echo with his sweet singing.

"Have you heard the latest 'bout Mrs. Moyle?" the new ale conner asked.

"Noa. What is it?"

"Here, come into this corner." They moved away and sat down, a little further out of the clattering noise of cups and saucers and more alone. "Well, young Simmons an' Davy Inge have had a game with her,—an' a fair hot un it was!"

Jonas laughed quietly, as Jinglejoy said, "Aye?"

Lowering his voice to little more than a whisper, the miller resumed. "It was some nights after that drinkin' bout she had at Waterside last week. They did it, Inge said, to see if they couldn't stop her of this awful guzzling. Poor Moyle!" Jonas felt all the more sympathy for the wheelwright because he had lately followed Mrs. Moriety's example by joining Moyle's little band of "Peculiars." "What did they do but get hold on her when she was 'bout fairly gone (I b'lieve as they gave her drink to help 'em), an' take her down into one of them vaults that have doors an' steps outside the church, you know. 'Course it was no trouble to Simmons—the young hairbrain, he fears nothing!—to get the keys unbeknown to his father. Then they puts her on a coffin-shelf, with her head on a chunk of wood, an' throws a horse-rug over her——"

"Good Lor'!" Jinglejoy interrupted.

"Yes, but wait a bit—that's nothing. They had a stable lantern an' they put it so as they could see her without he seein' them an' it; an' they put some black crape over it to make it dim an' funeral-like. Then they gave her a big dose o' strong soda-water, and got hid, an' presently groaned like one o'clock; so that by-an'-bye she

groaned an' sits up an' ses, 'where am I?' 'In t'other world,' ses they,—'cause this is what they wanted her to say. 'Oh,' ses she, 'which world?' 'Why, which can you expect?' they asked; and, of course, they just mumbled, grave-like, so as she shouldn't know who they was. 'I see,' ses Mrs. Moyle, 'that's why I'm so, parched then'"——

"Good sakes alive!"

"'How long have I bin here?' she ses. 'Three weeks,' ses they. 'An' how long have you bin?' 'Three years,' one of 'em said. 'Then feel in my pocket,' ses she; 'there's a thre'p'ny-bit there, an' fetch a pint,—you'll know the way better 'an I do.'" Jonas sat back, smiling and looking at the old man; but the latter was now amazed into silence. So the miller leaned forward once more and began again. "Well, what does Simmons do but hand her the last drop o' the'r soda-water, an' t'wasn't much. 'Course, they was pretty well flum-maxed be the way she took it; but Simmons isn't the young chap to cry stinkin' fish till all's real bad. When she'd drunk it she grunted. So he axed, keepin' hisself back in the dark, 'what's the matter with it? Isn't it good enough?' 'Yes,' ses the good lady, 'what there is on it.' 'Well,' he axes her, 'what ar' you grumblin' at, then? Isn't ther' enough on it?' 'Yes,' ses she agen, 'such as it is.'" And again the miller sat back to watch his companion, who now said,

"Well, of all the tales I iver heeard!"

"Ay, you may well say it, Jingle. She's a spry un, is Mrs. Moyle; they couldn't have her, you see. Look, it doesn't matter where she gets drunk, she finds her way home all right an' keeps out the constable's hands.—Not as he'd take her, for poor Moyle's sake."

Now, when the underlying gruesomeness of the "lark" had been dwarfed in the old man's mind by the raw humour of it and its peaceful outcome, he let his little body go back against the wall and laughed, in his quiet chuck-

ling way, till water trickled down his seemingly delicate but healthy furrowed cheeks to the whitening hair that hid his tender mouth; and so he laughed till, as he said in gasps, "he could hardly howd hisself together."

In the midst of this Pinch Jellie walked in and stood just clear of the folding doors. "Dressed to the nines" —in straight-creased, wide-cut trousers of a small light-coloured check; patent-leather shoes, half-hidden by pale-drab under-gaiters; a double-breasted buff waistcoat, across the front of which hung a heavy gold chain from pocket to pocket; an immaculate frock-coat, that spoke high for the tailors of Maldon and was set off by a delicate rose in the buttonhole; a tie that matched the tint of the rose; his hair carefully brushed and mustache waxed; the Malacca cane under his left arm, that hand covered with a new light-grey suède glove and the other glove and glossy "topper" held lightly with it; while the right hand hung bare at his side, ready for a "shake" if any of the "better people" came along. So stood "the Lady," for all the world to see, mark and admire; his one saving grace being the fact that he did not use perfumes. But all the world was apparently too busy to be concerned with a commonplace that looked on itself as a phenomenon. "The Squire," his lady and the Rector were out of sight. "That cold lady of the Rectory" was on the platform, in deep conversation with Tamar. The others were all bustling here, there and everywhere, heedless of all but the particular task in hand,—except the big woman with the long purse, who stood with her back towards the wall at one side of the long room, arrayed in fine silk of a definite hue, some old lace borrowed from Miss Scopes, a big antique broach (that she had bought as a "heir-loom" at a pawnbroker's in Maldon) and a long gold chain to match. But where the feminine was concerned "the Lady" was rather choice in the selection of his company. Besides, although he did see certain delicate

advantages whenever he stood at the side of Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, he had a strong dislike to having his dapper figure made to appear to be less than it was by the bulk of the purse-bearer. So, preferring the lesser evil of the two, and seeing no one on whom his otherwise well-arranged advent would make a particular impression, he turned aside and imposed his shop-window presence on the two happy squinters in the corner.

For the time being Pinch had quite forgotten the "mill joke." And if he had neither discovered any actual evidence against the perpetrators of it nor had succeeded in bringing Simmons "to book," what did it matter? Had his shallow dignity not been appeased by further afternoon calls at the Hall Farm, with this subject for the excuse, and half-hour feastings of his eyes and senses on the quiet-faced, tight-bodiced charms of Tamar? Was he not now sure that Farmer Shuttleworth had connived at the indignity heaped upon him? And, moreover, was he not now about to have a tremendous revenge on the big man for all things, and at the same time have it publicly shown that he had served the Rector in such a way as must make the latter admit him to the select clique of the place? As to whether or not Abe might, in a moment of rage, pick him up and give him a thrashing—this had not yet entered his mind. Then, again, if the Rector—who had been annoyed when he discovered the truth on the previous night—should publicly turn against him in this matter, he could turn round, tell Farmer Shuttleworth that he had merely obeyed the Rector's desire as to the donations, and thus keep the doors of the Hall Farm open to him. For had he not assured both the Rector and Mrs. Chapman, the night before, that this money matter was a mistake?—that he had taken Mrs. Chapman's words as a sort of direction, and had thought, by it, that the Rector and Farmer Shuttleworth had come to an understanding on the subject. It was owing to these mat-

ters that Pinch's mind was so much out of its usual vein that he spoilt the happy gossip of the two squinters so far as to make Jonas ask him if he had been "drinkin' vinegar?" It was the hour of his triumph; yet he could not avoid a heavy bitterness that was as foreign to him generally as it was now disturbing. The plain truth was, the storm that had seemed to be of no account while it remained far enough away, was now formidable by its very nearness.

Tea was almost finished when Abe arrived. He was put down at the door by Lucian; who then drove the trap home, to return later. Having no particular care to hear the dull opening speeches, and knowing that he would be in time for the presentation that was to be made to Abe, therefore for the latter's only speech and for his own "turns" in the entertainment that was to follow, Lucian had already decided that, to maintain some independence which he had felt compelled to show to 'Ola and Ben earlier in the day, he must be at this "show" as little as possible.

The moment that Abe's tawny top and rather striking figure appeared inside the doors—just where "the Lady" had stood unregarded, barely an hour before—there was a slight hubbub up and down the three tables which nearly filled the length and breadth of the room. Then a cheer broke out, which Abe acknowledged as he began to make his way towards the platform, where the Rector and a few of his helpers were standing. Then came "a rouser for the parson;" and the extent to which the latter had crept into popularity, entirely in the matter of the Institute, was exhibited by the strength of the cheering.

At the foot of the platform steps Abe encountered Mrs. Chapman; who was pale from her exertions and her recent illness. She greeted him with the same quiet formality that had always marked her bearing towards him,

and turned again to her duties. Then Tamar buttonholed him on the opposite side, with the whispered injunction that he *must* improve his appearance before he took his seat with "the Squire" and the others on the platform. At this reproof he shrugged his shoulders and went up the steps—if the clothes that were good enough for him to go to Chelmsford in, and attend to important legal and other business there, were not sufficiently smart for his neighbours' liking on such an occasion as this one, then they could lump what they didn't like. In truth, highly-strung as he happened to be at the moment, he was annoyed at Tamar's raising this stale and generally irritating subject of personal appearance.

"Ah, Mr. Shuttleworth, I am glad you have arrived; for I find it necessary to have a little conversation with you before the opening ceremony begins," said the Rector, in his usual bland placidity of manner; with the exception that the words were accompanied by a smile, the curious nature of which escaped the notice of the more elemental farmer.

"All right,—where shall it be?" the latter asked.

"In here will do, I think," was the reply; and the Rector led the way into a small side room off the back of the platform, which had been constructed as a dressing room for performers at entertainments, or a class room on Sundays, and was now littered with the feminine helpers' hats, jackets, etc., and the et cetera of the feast. But one thing was too peculiar for Abe to omit seeing—the Rector locked the door; and as he turned from doing so his gaze met the questioning one of Abe, so questioning and so direct that the cleric at once said, "It is all right, Mr. Shuttleworth,—I simply want to guard against abrupt intrusion, that is all." Still Abe plainly showed that he was mystified; but he remained silent, and a sort of constraint was already being felt. It was for this reason that the other hastened to add, "Sit down,—won't

you." Abe sat down, and the Rector followed his example, saying, "I am sorry—very sorry, Mr. Shuttleworth, that I have some information to impart that you may possibly not like. I say 'possibly' advisedly, because I still hope that we shall agree and be friends over the matter."

"Why, what is it?" was the question that came to the accompaniment of much surprise and the knitting of eyebrows.

"Well, to be brief, that is the trouble; for it is not so easy to explain as one might think."

"But what is it?"

"First, I must ask you not to be too hasty in your conclusions, and not to blame any one, especially Mr. Pinch Jellie. Because it is more a mistake, really, than anything else. In fact, I do not think—that is when you understand it completely, although it is all contrary to your wishes—I do not think but that you will see it is all a mistake, or rather the outcome of a mistake."

"I don't see what you're talking about. And, for my part, I think it would be best to state the effect then go to the cause," said Abe, on whom this quiet and indecisive opening was beginning to make a bad impression.

"Well, briefly, it is this," the Rector resumed, still looking steadily and with the utmost calmness at Abe, and having no other desire in his mind than to make peace all around. "When you so kindly handed the matter of this building over to me, and I was forced to enlist the services of Mr. Jellie—because he could devote so much time to the various matters, and I had not the time to spare for many of them,—when he came to my assistance I got him, as perhaps you will remember, to gather in the donations." The Rector paused, and Abe nodded. "And I told him that he had better, for the sake of making all clear as we went along, get a brief statement from each donor as to what the money was given for, and to give

a receipt in the same wording." Again Abe inclined his head, wondering whatever all this preamble meant and in what it would end. "As a matter of fact, I did not look into these matters at all, till we came to put all the papers in order last night. What I did as regards the money was merely to check the amounts as they were paid into the bank and to make a list of the donors' names and what they gave, according to the amount in each case. Then, as you will see, or perhaps you remember, when we elected a Building Committee we were all absorbed—entirely, I assure you—in the plans and the erection itself. So that it was not really till last night, when everything was gone over in tabulated order, so that the history of the whole matter would be straightforward—it was not till then that I knew the money had not been given as you said it was to be given."

"Why—But what does all this mean?" asked Abe, who was even more puzzled than he had been at the outset.

"Why," was the answer, given with a faint, bland smile, "that the money has not been given quite as you meant it should be given. But, still, as I said, I hope we shall agree. And, really, I don't see why we cannot——"

"Look here, Mr. Chapman, will you be plain, please?"

But for a while longer the Rector could not "be plain." Then, at length, Abe understood that each donation had been given and received in writing to the effect that the gift was "for a church Institute."

"I knew nothing of it till the building was up, and we were putting all the papers in consecutive order yesterday evening," the other concluded. "If you like, I will call Mr. Pinch Jellie in to confirm my words," he added, half-rising.

"Thanks, no—sit still," said Abe, motioning with his hand for the Rector to remain seated. "A parson's word should require no confirmation." And that bland church-

man noticed the unfortunate wording of his offer as he saw a smile lingering about the face of Abe, and realised that the latter had apparently mastered whatever inclination there had been in him to "flare up." "Besides, in this case, it would be so much like a fallen angel, of a lesser brand that is, calling the Devil in to sign his testimonial of respectability. No sir, I want no Pinch Jellies to confirm an art of fraud. Nay, hear me out—I heard you out. And if it isn't fraud, then that word shouldn't be hurtful to you—a parson, and secure in his own integrity to boot. It won't be hurtful to him, I'm sure; though I'm not supposed to be a reader of character."

There was a shaking at the handle of the door to which neither of them paid any heed. "Candidly, Mr. Chapman, I don't believe you—quite. What's more, sir, you shall not take my natural rights and privileges from me and offer them to me as concessions—as you are good enough to suggest, by asking me into the affair with you. You wanted the Institute, body and soul in a way, and you have it; and it's all been so easy to do, in the way it has been done. Now we shall see what happens. What I'm going to do remains to be seen—I haven't quite decided yet. But I don't think I shall give you any trouble over this pretty little piece of business—for the village's sake, not for yours." This was comforting, at least.

Without pausing, Abe continued, in a hard, quiet voice which was much more acceptable than the burst of anger that had been expected. "However, now, let us try to understand each other. You have got your way—how, you know and I can guess. It was easy enough, I dare say, seeing that probably no giver suspected the truth,—only the few who were possibly in the swim with you. And you would warp me in to follow your bent. You have accused me—you and a few of your party, again and again, of Socialism. But let me tell you, Mr. Chapman,

it's you that's the Socialist. You're the mental Socialist who would pull the higher down to your lower level. No, —to quit the general and come to the concrete, you are a parishioner first and last; I, it seems to me, am a citizen of the world—that is, by contrast. Therefore we can't pull together."

"You are very hard, Mr. Shuttleworth," was all that he dared to venture, lest he should stir up the fire which he could now see was burning slowly. Besides, he still hoped to "arrange the matter."

"Not harder than you deserve, so far as I can see. You know, it's such men as you who do more harm to the church in one generation than is undone by three ordinary good men in succession—ay, to every religion, in fact, not to the church only. Nay, sit still!—What you don't want to hear me say in public you had better hear in private." The Rector seemed to be less inclined to make for the door. So Abe resumed, mercilessly now that he had quite grasped all the bearings of the case, as he thought, and was out to castigate where he felt that such a whipping might do some good. "You know, you never ought to have been a parson; because you're not a minister of God, any more than I am. You're a minister to your own desires and necessities,—that's all; the rest is just a living to you, well paid, and easy because you are. You're just one of those persons to whom all the world is a counter for them to trade across and get the highest price possible for more or less worthless goods. And I should say——"

Stung to the point of revolt, the cleric hastily left his chair and turned towards the door, saying, "Sir, you insult me!"

"And, as sure as you're a disgrace to the clothes you wear, if you open that door I'll insult you to the length of telling the whole place what you've done!" cried Abe, springing to his feet and apparently ready for anything.

The other halted, turned about and saw that the better way for him was to bear the ills he had on the spot. Publicly he might say this or that, and bring Pinch Jellie to prove either; but he knew quite well that if the truth were known, that he and Abe had not previously agreed for the Institute to be a church building, and that he and others had vainly done their utmost to persuade Abe to this end—the case would be so black against him that no one would believe it to be a mistake. The situation was so awkward that he could see no way to mend it. Indolent and weak as he had been, he knew that he had not deserved this; yet circumstances said that he must bear it, or bring a worse evil to the front. He had not thought of a reversion of the money to Abe's original purpose. Thus for some moments the two men glared steadily at each other; then Abe resumed, again in that hard, quiet tone which served as a thin boiler-top to his anger, "As I was saying, I have met those who are worldly to their finger-tips, yet are about as ignorant of the world as they can be; mostly, I should say, they're so grown up at fifteen that they never grow any further in mind after that age. And it seems to me that you must have been one of them.—Yes, well, if you want to speak, speak; but open that door, and I'll give you the worst ten minutes you ever had in your life."

"Well, at least you might respect the cloth I wear," said the Rector, in injured anger, and giving voice to the first thought that came along.

"You should have set me the example, parson, then I would have followed. But, then, you see, you couldn't, because it wasn't in you. As I said before, it's such as you who drive thinking men and women from religion. Stay——" he clapped his hands to his sides. "Yes, I have it—look here, the very thing—nothing could hit it finer," and out of his coat pocket he quickly jerked a closely folded newspaper, adding with more warmth as

he proceeded, "I read it on my way down in the train to-day. Better lines of their sort never saw the baldness of print.—It's the *Daily Chronicle,* you see. A bit Socialistic, perhaps, to you—eh? Well?" In unfolding the paper he showed the large heading on the front page, but made no pause in his search for what he wanted. "Nothing great, you see, in the way of literature; but wait.—Here's the gem, listen:

"'Lord, if the priests have built Thy courts too narrow,
Guarding the door against believing doubt,
Grant me the faith and courage of the sparrow
To build a nest without.

"'No password keeps the eaves' protecting hollow,
No cages hang outside the cloister wall;
Grant me to worship with the unbound swallow,
Free as the prisoned Paul.'—

[Now keep quiet—I'm going to finish in my way]—

"'Let feeble fires on narrow altars crackle,
The shrunken souls of narrow men to save;
Thy altar is the sun; Thy tabernacle,
The sky's unwarded nave.'

That's it, sir,—signed 'A. W.,'* whoever that may be. And a finer mental portrait of you and such parsons as you are could hardly be written. The religion is right enough, the finest that man has found, to my thinking; and the chuch is good on the whole. But you and your kind are the putrifying sores on an otherwise healthy body. If I had my way, I would——"

Someone was at the door again; and before Abe could say a word to the contrary, the Rector was there and had the door open. The person was Mrs. Chapman; who, privately thinking that her husband had been too

* Arthur Waghorne.

long with the energetic farmer, had come to say that "the Squire" and the others were ready for the opening ceremony. Hearing what she said and satisfied with his castigation for the time being, Abe walked past them, his head up and his heart full of anger. Meanwhile Mrs. Chapman, after glancing at her husband, gave Abe a look which he happily ignored.

II.

WHAT the Rector's wife had said was quite true; everything seemed to be in readiness. The tables had been cleared away, and the body of the hall was filled with strong chairs, on which sat a motley throng with shining faces, some of them being pale and thin in contrast to the others; these were from the now established labour colony. The two front rows of seats were occupied by the local donors and their friends, the subscribers to the salver and the general helpers; most conspicuous amongst them being Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, who had vainly hung about "the Squire" in the hope of a conversation with him, and now thought that she—as the giver of the largest sum—ought to have been on the platform. For had she not as much right there as the Building Committee—which had now become a Committee of Management—or even Mr. Chapman, or "the Squire"? who was in the chair. Abe sat down on the first empty chair he found, which happened to be at the end of the semi-circle. The Rector and his wife stopped their whispering and left the anteroom, he going to his place by the chairman, she down to a seat between her sister and Tamar in the front row. Then, after a few remarks in an undertone with "the Squire," Mr. Chapman stood up and gave a brief history of what had led to the erection of the building, the longest parts being a reading of the donor's names, the amounts given, and the cost of different items. In this Abe came in for much praise, too much for his liking under the circumstances; and he smiled inwardly, for

it was whilst the Rector spoke that he decided what his plan of action should be. Then the chairman, who had some gifts of oratory, announced the Institute open; and word was passed along for Abe to follow, but his reply was that what he had to say he would say after the presentation. Another took his place, and more followed till it seemed as if the entertainment would have to be postponed for that night. Next came the presentation of the silver salver to Abe, as a memento of his winning the barley-delivery action, which had at last fixed the law on this matter and had removed a decided and growing disadvantage from Agriculture in Essex. Now Abe had to take his turn, and briefly, heartily he thanked the farmers who had subscribed to the gift, saying that if he could make sure of such an ending to each lawsuit of the kind he would have one in every month of the year. This being done, he said,

"And now I come to other matters, one of which, I'm sorry to say, is much less pleasant." He paused to use his handkerchief, and there was a general pricking up of ears. In fact the Rector and his wife showed such an increased interest as to jerk their faces towards him. Pinch Jellie—who, as an evidential act of innocence, had squeezed himself and his fine clothes into the midst of the Hall Farm party—also turned his keen small eyes quickly that way. While Lucian, from his place on the right of 'Ola (which had fallen to him as much by chance as intention; he having been once more brought into complete subjection) detected, rather in the tone than in the words of his friend, that some very untoward incident had happened since their parting at the door of the Institute. 'Ola, knowing her father as she did, naturally saw that there was something new to come; and she was certainly anxious as to what it would prove to be, for which reason she stopped her light, incidental remarks to Ben Ramsbottom, on her left, and narrowly

watched her father's face as she listened to him more intently.

As to Abe: with his line of action formulated, he felt that for the time being the stage was his, and in making his farewell exit he would use his last opportunity to the best advantage—within his lights. Duped, fooled, his work and purpose wrested from him at the moment of fruition, he yet knew that in certain ways he was master of the situation, and could carry the crowd with him. He also felt a certain human pride in the fact that, as he stood there, he "cut a figure" that was strikingly distinctive from the row on his right. But he did not know, as did others who watched him closely and marked points of contrast between then and now, that a change had come over him during the past twelve months—a difference that was all the more noticeable now that he had somewhat similarly stood on several occasions a year ago. Lucian saw this most of all, Tamar least. There was the same tawny hair, the same virile figure as had marked the head of the huge table at the harvest-home. There were also many of the same flashing looks, now rather characterized by a militant touch than by one of humour. There was much of the old fire and the quick change from grave to gay and back again in his oratory. In spite of all this, however, there was also a subtle difference somewhere—a waning in the old ceaseless energy; a falling-off in that occasional and attractive lightness of touch; a perceptible loss of flesh and a certain curious tendency to show irritation. He coughed, then resumed,

"This may be my last speech amongst you for a long time to come, perhaps the last of all—I can't say. So I'm going to take the liberty of a rather long talk and a straight talk." Now both 'Ola and Tamar saw that something in the nature of a revelation was coming; and the daughter, unconscious that the same thought was

in the minds of the Rector, his wife and Pinch Jellie, feared that it might be an upheaval. "I have said that I thank every man who has had a share in this presentation, and for more than a personal reason," Abe continued. "To me, it shows that we are drawing closer together, and that is what we want,—co-operation, co-operation, till we all come into one line, the line of our mutual and general betterment. Without co-operation we're a lot of loose sticks, not one of which can stand up for itself hardly. With co-operation we can do lots—perhaps even move the railway companies to treat us as something British, that is fairly. We all want it; we're all crying out for it, but it's more than one man's work—I know, for I have spent two years in continual effort and argument in trying to get justice out of the G. E. R., and cannot budge them the fraction of an inch. Now I give it up in despair." From the subscribers to the salver there were some murmurs of dissent. "Yes, it's all very well to say 'Don't;' but the best don't would have been to co-operate with me. It's all very well for the G. E. R. to foster sugar beet growing here and there in the country and to give special facilities to carry it to big centres —a ton of such stuff doesn't occupy much space in a truck. But the point is that beet can only be grown on a particular sort of land, and good land at that; and what we want, as a body, is 'special facilities' for farm produce generally. What we farmers ought to do—altogether, to the last man of us—is to force the Government to make railway companies give us these facilities. But the average farmer is afraid that if he goes to a railway company and says this or that isn't fair, he will have to pay higher rates still for grumbling. As a class we're behind our times, friends; and it behooves us to whip up a bit and get into line with the times. In fact, the average farmer to-day, I'm sorry to say, is a man that's got hold of wrong ideas and sticks to them, like Satan to a

half repenting sinner. Well, it's time that we harrowed up these ideas—that we ploughed a bit deeper and a bit deeper, both in the land and in the life we live. When I was a lad there was a story in our school-books that I shall not forget as long as I live, because I've put it to the test and proved it. It was about a farmer dying; and just before the end came he called his sons into the room and told them that buried somewhere in their land there was treasure that might prove to be a fortune—he didn't know just where it was, but it was there. Well, of course, they couldn't go out with spades and pick-axes and make claypits and quarries of every perch in three or four hundred acres. So what did they do but every year—as they had to keep the farm going and earn their living—they ploughed deeper and deeper till they could do no more in that way. Then when about ten years had gone by and no treasure had been found, and they were sitting talking about it over their churchwardens and October ale one night, they tumbled on the fact that their harvests had been heavier and heavier each year, till one of them suddenly ups and says—'That's it! That's what father meant!' The others, not being so quick-witted, asked what he meant; and he told them what I needn't tell you—except, plough deeper."

"Then you can't keep foreign wheat out, 'nless you stops it!" cried a farmer.

"And we don't want to," Abe replied—"at least I don't want to; my plan is different to that. They tell you, as a nation, we can't feed our own,—that is in meat and corn. I tell you that's all my eye and Betty Martin. We could do it easily enough, if matters were better arranged. Every piece of ground in the kingdom —unless it be for public recreation or some other real need of the people, or for trade purposes or something of that—should be put under tillage. (Abe was too much absorbed by his subject to see "the Squire's" smile

of interested pity.) Then, with a proper proportion for corn and other foodstuffs and for grazing, and with a first call on the home markets—which, I think, ought to be ours—(heedless of certain Conservatives' audible and pleased acceptance of this, Abe continued) and a proper check on all unfair profits, then we could feed the nation and live comfortably ourselves."

"What about the marshes?" some one asked.

"Even they can be made to bear," was his answer. "Look at what the Dutch did in Lincolnshire—and the science we have and they hadn't. All that the marshes want is to be properly drained, fed and banked for protection. Even moors can be made productive. Science has shown us that every yard of earth will bear something that's of use to man; we've only to treat it properly, and get to know what it's best suited for."

Here he was assailed by a little fusillade of questions, all being politically coloured red or blue; and showing various conditions of mind, from the serious heckling to the merely humorous. And here it was that much of the real man was seen; the visionary and the man of action in one; the man who—if judged by the bulk of his talk, by the natural attraction of his transparent personality to all who had any love of honest motives, and by his physical appearance and power to make a success of a thing so long as he was unhampered by petty worries—might have made himself an untrodden road to fame, have done an immeasurable amount of good for his fellows, perhaps for his country; have shown new ways to new benefits, and have done harm to no man. But the heel of Achilles had not been dipped; and in Abe's case the undipped portion was rather a large part of the whole.

"But who's to spend money on the marshes an' that?" came the query.

"The nation, of course," said he; and again political

colours arose in friendly battle. "We come of the soil, all of us; and are native to it, when we are our real selves; we live on it, are part of it, and should live on what it produces close at hand—when we can, and we all could if we would. Believe me, this is a far more vital point to the race than most folk think it is; it's one on which the nation's going wrong—this depending on foreign foodstuffs, when seventy or eighty per cent could be provided at home, if the nation and the authorities only went about it in the right way. It's a point on which we, as a people, are bound to come to grief—that's my opinion. The nation, as a whole, isn't run on proper lines; there's too much leaving things to chance and everybody to himself, on the old notion that things will all settle down together somehow. But we shall be sorry for it some day—when it's too late. Look at the instance of this in the railways. They're vital to the national welfare to-day.—Well, then shouldn't they be run for the good of the State? Why, on the continent agricultural produce is carried at cheaper rates than anything else and has a prior claim to be carried, because it is the staple of the people, of course. Look at that in contrast to the way we are treated by these monopolies and amalgamations; and it's only by contrast that we can get value, without contrast there would be no value. And look at the contrast between our farmers and French farmers, who are helped by their scientific chemists. What would the average English farmer say if he were told to treat his grain with sulphur dioxide, and that it would rid it of weevil and improve its colour and do it no harm? And yet it's a fact. I've heard it said, I think, that what is pertinent to the individual is mostly inapplicable and often impertinent to the crowd; but in this case, I'm sorry to say, it seems to me to be the other way about. And there's no good to be got by hiding the truth. On the other hand there are missionaries abroad

of whom it is best for us to be careful—missionaries who make me inclined to say: from our ignorant and self-appointed friends, from the charlatan who lives by pretending that he loves us and from the layman specialist in general, good Lord deliver us. In some cases they are as sticklebacks on a whale or peas shot at an ironclad; but in others, worse luck, they do harm that takes years to weed out. In this connection I might alter a certain well-known phrase by asking: What do they know of farmers who only farmers know? We farmers were put into starvation conditions in order to enrich shipowners, dockowners, railwayowners and other owners of that sort; and we have been kept there, and shall be kept there till we get up and force the powers that be to open the gate and let us out. We're in the pound, and we must either pay the pinder ourselves or break out. Some of these missionaries abroad in the land talk of Protecting us; but we don't want protection. We want fair play, that's all. Look at your protected things; they're always weaklings. Well, do we want to be the weakling in the family of national industries?—not much, I take it. I say give us fair play and we shall soon get strong and hardy enough to look after ourselves, *and* get fat on it. Did you ever know anything British that didn't grow strong when it had fair play? No, no more did I. But we shall have to help ourselves to get strong by adopting modern methods—by bringing in every aid that we can get hold of, seed-forcers, grain-preservatives and labour-saving appliances—('I think on us men, sir!') because if we don't we shall be thrust closer to the wall than we are now; and even now if a brick falls it falls on us. Yes, I'm thinking of you men—by trying to get more land into cultivation and farmers more energetic generally; that, I take it, is the best way to benefit you. And here I've done with that subject for the present."

Whilst the place rang with hearty applause, Abe went

to the chairman's table for a drink of water; then he began again.

"Well, we hear a lot to-day about back to the land; and for my part I'm just as ready as the next one to say —Amen to that,—providing it is *back* to the land. But —and you can believe me or not; I'm stating my experience, that's all—a failure in town is not going to be a success on the land unless he has a natural affinity for the soil; say, like Mr. Dunstan has, for example. By all means let us have back the men that hard times, miserable dullness and petty tyranny and foolishness have driven away—because you know, you men, I mean, and I don't care who hears me say it—you know there's a heap of petty tyranny on the land to-day. Little and big alike, nearly every master's too fond of telling every singer what song to sing. Well, I say if they really *want* to come back, let 'em come; because if they don't want to come they'll do no good here. It's the same as putting a college cap and gown on an ignoramus; you may dress up the outside as you like, but the inside remains the same. You may make laws till you're black in the face; but no laws ever made a man love that which the law said was lawful." "That's true, that's true!—Every word on it!" cried Mr. Varley, as he chuckled mirthfully. "So it is, you can wager, with working on the land. All the same for that, however, if I had my way every man in the kingdom should work at something; either as a freeman or in a settlement; and every acre of land should be put to some profitable use, or the owner of it should pay a double tax for keeping it idle. You may call it socialism, but it isn't because I wouldn't interfere with personal ownership. But to come back to the land. I've just learnt of one of these back-to-the-land-men; he started life in a ditch, but it was Shoreditch—not that his was any fault of his; he sold papers and that sort of thing; then a charity society got him

placed with a farmer who told him to brush (trim) the hedge, and he did—with a stable-broom." Here he was interrupted by roars of laughter in which some members of the labour colony did not join. "These unadopted would-be-sons of the brown earth—they don't know her ways and she doesn't know them; there's no touch of nature between 'em—till they're dead. It's millions to half-pennys that the man who is to succeed on the soil must be bitten by the countryside and not take it as a last resource; he must have some of that behindness that a cat has when it's about to sit down—you notice, a cat never sits on anything that's above the level, whether it can see the thing or not. That's what I call learnèd instinct; and that's what the successful tiller must have, whether he works in a large way or a small way. For the man who comes to the land because it draws him, whether it's back to it or not, I've every respect for him; but I must say it is more for the one who comes back to it. In the towns to-day there are thousands who left the land, have lost their knowledge of it, and are doing no better there—often worse—than they did here. And in that there's another tragedy besides starving—it's the tragedy of narrowing, cramping, poisoning. For if a man loves digging and weeding and growing the soil has a broadening effect on him, and he can't prevent it any more than he can help growing older and perhaps wiser. Nay, I'll go further; for it seems to me that there's a sort of divinity that attracts such a man to that which gives him health and a living, from which he came and to which he must return. The man with whom the soil flourishes properly is the man who has success in his blood, according to his knowledge of what he tries to do; because he has commonsense and knows the value of detail and thoroughness. Now I'm going to say a bit to you villagers."

To laughing requests not to "lay it on too thick" and

the like he answered, "No, no thicker than what is needed—I'm going to tell you a few plain truths." 'Ola felt that he was about to make a few plain enemies; but even if she could have told him so, he would have continued as he did. "Taken as a whole you're a patient, dogging, close-mouthed lot who put up with much more than you ought to. You bear your burdens and don't moan about 'em; that's as it should be—mostly, but not always. At the same time, as we say in the north, you're better fed than taught—you want too much meat and don't know the value of pudding. What I mean is, with all your virtues you're an extravagant and thriftless lot. Look at the facts—ordinary food flour isn't good enough for you; you must have the very finest whites (weak stuff that I wouldn't touch) or you're not getting your due. You seem to have no more discrimination between stone ground and steel milled flour than a barn fowl has. If I'd my way I'd imprison the man who ground corn between steel rollers. Up north it's pudding first, and mostly home-made bread from whole meal; and do you think any six of you could work against six north countrymen?" He smiled; while those to whom he talked took it all, as they, at one time or another, had taken much more of the same hard hitting truths—that is, outwardly with good humour, but secretly with the stated and suspicious reserve of the Essex peasant.

"Then there's your women—patient and plodding and say-nothings, just like yourselves. But they're not good at working things together—don't seem to be quite sharp enough, somehow. Look at going short of other things to keep a coal fire all day in summer, when a paraffin stove wouldn't cost a third of the coals and always be handy—just for want of will to save enough to buy the stove. Of course, it's the same old tale—just as me mother did, just as me father did. Yet it isn't quite so in your case; because you've left the plain healthy ways

of your fathers and mothers to imitate the fancy fooleries of those who are supposed to know better. Look at this fact, and it speaks volumes both for you and against you —you never see a gleaner in Essex,—at least I never did; though, as you know every woman's at liberty to glean in my fields when the carting's done. And this is a proof to me that you don't know what frumenty is, and whether you're more to be pitied or blamed in that I don't know—blamed, I think. More self help and more self respect seems to me to be what most of you want—it's a racial feature that only yourselves can wipe out; but whether you care to or not 's another matter. I'm telling you the truth, whether you stone me or not afterwards; and it's the last time I shall tell you. And now I come to the last I have to say; and I will be brief, for there's no laugh in it, either for you or me." Here he paused, voluntarily; while all those listeners who knew him were tip-toeing on expectation rather than pondering on his "plain" truths. Again he blew his nose; but the action was more to hide the emotion that had suddenly welled up in him than anything else. And during that short pause Mr. and Mrs. Chapman, Pinch Jellie, Lucian, 'Ola and a few others near the platform, together with old Jinglejoy and Jonas further back, became keenly alive to his words and to that abrupt alteration in tones and bearing. The first two were naturally asking themselves what he was about to say—How much of the apparent truth would he tell? How far would they be called on to prove the whole thing a mistake? On his part the retired grocer cared nothing, except when he looked at Tamar. It was true that he could fasten no blame on the Rector, because no specific instruction had been given to him; but, then, it *was* a mistake. And, he was telling himself, if need be he would get up and say so; he would say that he thought—he could not state just why; but, never mind, he would say he thought the Rector and

Mr. Shuttleworth had come to an arrangement in the matter; then he would stand the racket of what might happen afterwards; they wouldn't do him any violence, anyway. What he had brought about had not been done with his eyes shut to any apparent consequence. If he had then seen the light in which Tamar's attractions were to appeal to him later on, he might have hesitated in following the line of that delicate hint at the out-setting; although he had, he considered, reaped some benefit by Mrs. Chapman's thawing to him so much during the time he spent in collecting the donations. But nothing short of such a foresight would have checked him in this revenge, and he felt so now, as he and the others waited rather anxiously for Abe to continue. All his time in the place had been a continued effort "to get into the respectable swim" that circled around the Rectory, with even Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling as a sort of enlarged beacon on the inner edge of the stream. In vain, however, with the exception of an occasional peep, he could get no further than being one of the crowd on the fringe of the vortex, between it and the undisturbed waters made up of the cottagers. Then had come his unfortunate part in "the manslaughter case," whereby he lost completely all the ground he had made. So that when the Rector enlisted his services in this matter he had hailed the occasion as a godsend and waded straight in to break down the icy barrier that kept the Rectory "circle" as a semi-holy ground on to which such profane vulgar as he could not venture.

"You know, friends and neighbours,—know as well as I do, I dare say, that sorrows are the magpies that some folks let fly, while they keep all their singing birds at home," Abe continued, his big sonorous voice seeming to come from somewhere down in his stomach. "Well, so far I've brought my singing birds amongst you and kept my magpies at home; but in future I'll keep them

all there, one lot to keep the other company. What I mean is this—I'm making my last public appearance amongst you——" "No, no! No, no!" cried some of his listeners in the middle of the great room. "But I say—yes, yes. And, though it isn't of my choosing—for you can rely on it that this has been forced on me—that 'yes, yes' will have to stand. But there's one thing that's due to most of you, and that's an explanation." Here the Rector involuntarily stood up, as if to speak; and Abe, seeing him rising, paused to look towards him, ready now for any turn in events. But hardly had the cleric gained an upright position, when he caught the warning eyes of his wife fixed on him, realised that he was not acting in the best interests of his case, and sat down again. The silence was ominously full of the spirit of happenings. That jerky, accusative action of the cleric's was good for Abe, who saw it, and smiled slightly as he turned again to his audience. "But, before I do that, let me wish you all a fine and long success in your Institute—I mean *the church's Institute.* In management matters and that everything won't run straight—everything never did, and never will this side of heaven. But if you only go the right way to work you will keep a lot of trouble out. And the best advice that I can give you is—Be patient with one another, and bear in mind at all times that your particular reading of a man's action may not be the right one, and is likely enough not his. And I would say—keep politics out; they're only a waste of good time that could be devoted to some useful subjects. Politics are of no real use except to create dissension; to give some men grounds to talk on and on, ninety-nine per cent. of which, and some over, never did a scrap of real good to anybody; and to make a man reap benefits and honours which, not in one case in a thousand, were ever deserved. The world did its business pretty well and seems to have been

fairly happy, too, before politics were invented. So be merciful to yourselves and bar politics out. More still, bar out theology and everything on creeds and—But I forgot. I was thinking that the Institute was yours; but it isn't, it belongs to the church. You see, this idea of a village clubroom, lecture-hall and little theatre and that in one has been so long in my mind that, as it isn't an hour since I learnt that this place belongs to the church, I can't yet quite get accustomed to what has happened. And this is why I'm going to wash my hands of it." To cries of dissent he replied, "My friends, I'm much obliged to you for the kindness you mean; but I must be allowed to have my way in this, and I think you'll rather agree with me when I've done speaking." Here the chairman, turning from a whispered consultation with the Rector, arose and began to clear his voice. Before he could speak, however, Abe said to him, "Hear me out, sir. You called on me to speak, and I claim the right to finish."

"But, Mr. Shuttleworth, we think that, er——"

"If you don't sit down, sir; and allow me the right to finish, I will put it to the village here whether I'm to finish or not."

At the word "village" Abe waved his hand toward the audience, the majority of whom shouted, "Go on, Mr. Shuttleworth, go on!" "Tell us the truth!" "What's happened?" and similar urgings and questions till there was every promise of an uproar, and "the Squire" sat down at his own discretion. In fact he was not a little overawed at the powerful farmer's much stronger personality. Now turning his tawny head and "fresh" face to his audience again, that emotion changed to anger by this effort to "bottle him up," Abe resumed.

"Why I'm saying good-bye to you as regards this place is this. It was my intention, as I've just said, and, as I believe, most men knew, to have had here a building

the same as this, that would be the property of the whole village regardless of religion. To that end I canvassed up and down the country from here to Chelmsford and much further, in season and out, till I got promises for nearly all the necessary money. But I'm not here to inflame passions; only to clear the road—make things plain; and say good-bye quietly. Well, when the time came to go into the building matters my hands were very full of other things; besides, there was one man in the parish that I—mistakenly, I admit now—thought ought to be in the venture so as to make a complete success of it. So over to that man I handed the whole business—mind you, on the clear understanding as I've put it to you. He brought in other help, as he was at liberty to do. I was relieved of the whole thing, as I wanted to be. So things went on up to to-night; and when I came here, thinking to add my bit of praise to the general chorus for those who had worked so hard for you, saying to myself that we should now be a happy and united village and a pattern for others, and putting nice words together in my mind to compliment you on your fine possession, it was to be told that, owing to the way in which my work has been finished, the Institute is not yours, but the church's. Under the circumstances, do you wonder at my resolution to back out of it all?"

"No, sir!" "But don't—stop in, stop in!" and "Who did it? Who did it?" were the loud interruptions from those who had listened to him, five minutes before this, with suspicion and dislike.

"No, I shall not stop in; and I'll mention no names, for I've no desire to put a drag on the wagon before it starts. All I want is for you to understand why I'm doing this. But I will say this: So long as I remain in this parish I've done with the church. I heartily wish every success to the hall here; but I can't sit under a man for whom I've no respect."

In an instant there was commotion both on and off the platform. Truth to tell, Abe had, as he often did when his tongue was set wagging and his feeling ranged high, over-run the mark he had set himself. From the chairman and two or three others on the platform there were requests to "withdraw." A few of those in the front seats, including Mrs. Chapman, her sister-in-law, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling and the Wayletts, were murmuring disapproval; but the real tumult was caused by Abe's humble supporters and the bulk of those who had subscribed for the salver, the most of whom were crying "Shame, Shame!" "Scandalous!" and similar exclamations that might be either for or against Abe. As a matter of fact, the Rector's adherents thought the latter, and "the Squire" hammered his table and loudly called for order. Above him, however, and above the general hubbub Abe could be heard saying:

"You may shout and hinder me as you like, I will be heard! Ay, and stand the consequences! I withdraw nothing; but I'll lay the whole thing bare if I'm not allowed to proceed in my own way! When I've done, another can say what he likes; but I'll have my say first!"

Here there were shouts of "Name him, name him!" "Who's done it?" and the like, making the Rector's party quickly understand that they were in a very small minority. On the top of it all some ducks and geese, in a small farmyard close by, set up a quacking and clacking that was higher than the din inside the hall. Then into the midst of the hurly-burly of hoarse and strident voices, the waving of arms and general jarring of opposing factions, high above it all, bell-like but full of a feeling that no bell could have, and sweet with the peculiar grace of the rare heart that gave it its character, came the voice of Jinglejoy, singing, he standing on a chair:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou biddst me come to Thee—
O Lamb of God, I come!"

Barely had the old man reached the third line when the row and racket had dwindled to a mere buzz; and as he pealed out the fourth line, with a strangely magnetic feeling of reverence and penitence that found some degree of response in every hearer present, the whole audience became as mute as if they were listening to him in a place of worship. Regardless of this he sang on to the end of the hymn, his gentle face, whitening hair and iron-grey beard, and his crumpled little figure in its faded velveteen sleeved waistcoat and corduroy trousers standing out in curious relief to the inferior tweeds and younger heads around him. When by the help of Jonas and another, he descended from the chair—little thinking that from this hour to the end of his life he would have a corner to himself in the heart of Lucian—he had given to the meeting such a calm as it had not known ever prior to the tumult. So earnest, so searching and so appealing withal had been the old man's singing of the popular hymn that it seemed as if every person present was persistently communing with his or her conscience. Even Pinch Jellie's expression of deep thought was giving colour to the hitherto steadfast opinion of Miss Scopes, the schoolmistress, the old butcher-philosopher and a few others that "he was not half as bad as he was painted, and that if people didn't like a body they fancied more than they ought to." Whereas from under his eyebrows Pinch was watching that strong and distinctive figure on the platform, and was wondering if he would return to the attack. As if in answer to this Abe turned to the chairman and said:

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he refaced the audience and added, with all the calm firmness of a really strong man, "Jingle, this was as much unexpected as I thank you for it. And now, friends and enemies alike, I ask you to listen quietly to the few remaining words I have to say, then we will part in the peace that this fine old hymn has given us. From my resolution, as given to you a few minutes since, I shall not depart a single breath. From this forward I am as a man on one side, and the most I can say of the whole thing at present is, as you say in Essex here, 'it's a Coggeshall job.' But though I'm no longer to be counted in your village affairs, my offer holds good to grind corn at cost price—ay, and to sell it to any labourer on the land in this parish at the same as I sell it to my own men, which isn't much above cost price, as they will tell you. And I shall stop no women from gleaning, and plough up no footpaths; neither shall I let stiles get into a breakneck condition, so as to stop people from using the short cuts." This was particularly one for the Cawpkins and two or three more; as a matter of fact, it was a well-deserved back-hander to the Essex farmer generally. But, then, as 'Ola had often told him, when once Abe was on his feet no mortal could tell what truths would come out. And he might have gone from bad to worse here, but that he suddenly felt a return of the influence that came of Jinglejoy's singing, together with the recollection that he was saying farewell to things which had become dear to his heart; and he concluded, "What's more, next midsummer I'll give three prizes of a sovereign each—one for the best-kept garden in the parish, one for the best show of flowers and another for the best production of vegetables, from a dozen square yards of soil;" then his voice was made abruptly husky by a rush of feeling, as he said, "But I'll say no more, except—I wish you all good luck and . . . goodbye."

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With that he took his flat-topped felt hat off the piano

behind him, walked straight down from the platform and out of the building, in a deep silence that was not broken till fully a minute after he disappeared between the doors. Then Jinglejoy began to shuffle away after his master, accompanied by Dunstan and Jonas, the miller muttering, "I'd bung his odefearious eye up if I was the guv'nor;" and followed immediately by Lucian, who went outside, looked around, saw nothing of his friend—would have been surprised if he had—and returned to where his duty and affection pulled the stronger.

As Lucian knew he would, Abe swung his long strides quickly through the village street to get out and away from the habitations of men and petty doings. In a few minutes he had reached the northeastern end of the village proper and round the bend in the road he swung—to be momentarily pulled up by an uncertain reflection of light in the darkness ahead. What it was he could only guess and ran forward. About a quarter of a mile further on he discovered the flickering to be what he feared it was, a solitary cottage on fire; and as he drew near, panting with the run, he heard the screams of children. In an instant his powerful shoulder had thrust in the rickety door, and in he rushed, bumping his head against the low ceiling. He had seen from the outside that the fire was at the back and on the top; so up the stairs he went, his long figure covering half the distance. On the landing he burst open the door to what he guessed to be the backroom and found himself before the flames, which were blazing principally around the window and the head of an old wooden bedstead, at the foot of which two young children were cowering and shrieking in terror. At a glance Abe saw they were unharmed; so he shut the door, to stop the fire from being fed by that current of air. Then with the sole of his boot against the middle of the sash he sent the window crashing to the garden below, and immediately began to tear down and tumble out the

burning draperies, along with them the candlestick in which had been left the swaling cause of the mischief (a common habit with the rural poor when they go out and leave their children in bed). During this he talked and laughed to the children, getting great gulps of smoke as he opened his mouth, and losing the skin on his hands in getting rid of the blazing fragments. Under the low ceiling of that little room, in the smoke and glare of the diminishing light, his big form and tawny hair made him appear to be a giant to the little ones; who soon stopped their screams of fright to watch him putting an end to the fire. Hardly two minutes had passed from his entering the room. The danger was over. The room was full of smoke. He turned to the children, saying, "Come along, chicks—it's all right now; let's go downstairs." And he began to swathe them in the fringe-charred bedclothes, groping as best he could in the darkness and still rattling on brightly to them, they whimpering in uncertainty as to whether they should resume shrieking or be quiet; when there came a clambering up the oilcloth covered stairs and in stumbled a couple of labourers, with a lantern from a cottage further along the road.

Ten minutes afterwards—when the children had been made comfortable below, the smouldering extinguished above, one labourer sent off to the Institute for the little ones' parents and the other looking after them—Abe, with his hands wrapped in rags steeped in sweet-oil and thrust into his coatpockets, took to the road again. With his mind still crowded by the Institute matter—the fire, the saved children and his burnt hands now no more than a hardly heeded incident by the way—he swung along. Past his own farm he went, incidentally thinking that he would not much mind if the whole pile should go as the cottage bedroom had gone, providing no one was hurt and that the loss should serve as a permanent break between him and Tamar; past Dunstan's holding, and on

till the two "bears" and masses of small straws drew his mind to that canopy, the deep quiet blue of which seemed to whisper, "Peace, peace;" while over the "saltings" and river Orion was lifting his belt out of the indistinctiveness twixt sky and water in to the clearer ultramarine above, as if to point the moral and embellish the fact that "truth crushed to earth will rise again" and each fair thing will some day have its turn. And there, as he tramped along the margin of the "Ten Acres"—where Lucian had spent that first day in learning how to plough—finding relief in the scent of the brown earth and the beauty of that Autumn night, Abe saw all this; saw it and felt it, as he did not feel the physical pain in his burnt hands, adulterer, wife neglecter and despiser as he had been. It might be said that only the emotional transgressor really feels the depth of things. Your ploughers of straight furrows in the field of morality are those who see only the guiding object right ahead, and the much that they miss is too obvious for mention. Of all responsive natures surely the penitent wrong-doer is the most pliable, and particularly when his reading and understanding are wide and his sensibility is highly developed. So it was with Abe. And here, on this night that was to be long remembered in the parish, he felt the past much as the moralist will say he should feel it, groaned at the present and saw nothing in the future to attract him. Not more than two years and a half ago he had set out,—rather indefinitely then, though his purpose of fighting for better justice to his class was decided enough—to strive to make his little portion of the countryside what he thought it ought to be, what he would like to see it be—the home of broad tolerance; big hearts with big loves, big passions of the right sort, big laughs and now and then, just to keep the heart proportionately tender, a few big tears. Largely a materialist, or rather a strenuous Epicurean during the years of his "filling out" mentally, he had,

by the medium of his own wrong-doing, his wife's shrieking death and Tamar's slaying of his infant, come to that humaneness and more or less practical idealism which are fundamental to all large minds. And the natural, though by no means continuous, enthusiasm of his temperament had led him to think that much of what he wished to see done could be brought about by constant effort and faith in the ability to succeed. Now he saw all this slipping away, like water between his fingers—all his great good work set at nought and "made empty by the narrow jealousy of a cleric, who ought to have been a little shopkeeper and have lived mentally on the petty advertisements on the labels of what he sold." Owing to the ardentness with which he always pursued adventure when once embarked on it, he being one of those men who usually start with the feeling that they must win, he had deeply felt his want of success with the railway company; and this sudden and decisive blow to his work in the immediate vicinity, added to the other, now seemed to make everything spell—"Futility." It was a personal outlook; and from these two things his mind went back to the house behind him, where the material ghost of that time of riot was almost daily becoming more unbearable, and now came near to appearing to be the secret adherent of his enemies. So that, as he mostly did on such occasions, he turned to Holy Writ,—not for comfort or anything of that kind, but as a fit expression of the moment —and quoted from one of his favourite psalms, "I said, I will take heed to my ways: that I offend not with my tongue . . . I held my tongue and spake nothing . . . but it was pain and grief to me. My heart was hot within me, and while I was thus musing the fire kindled, and at the last I spake with my tongue. Lord, let me know mine end and the number of my days." And still he went forward, thinking of these frustrations and quoting texts and verses on them, not forgetting that favourite "Oh,

why did God, Creator wise," etc., till a couple of hours had gone by. Then the reverence of Jinglejoy's singing and a fresh feeling of pleasure at what he had done for those two children, together with the calm of the fields and the lonely quietude of the night returned to him; and, wheeling about for his tramp back home, he felt how much better it would possibly be for him to keep aloof from the petty motives, the belittling jealousies, the warping suspicions, the contemptible glories of borrowed plumes and all the common narrowness of average village life—poor and monied alike—and devote himself to his fields and his books, where the philosophy was ever world-wide, the recompense great and abiding; and where, from teeming earth and cupping sky and all the immensity between, the great good God of all things was ever eloquently present.

WANING SEASONS

III.

SOMETIMES when Abe happened to be down by the "saltings," some of which he was doing his best to put under regular and profitable tillage (because it would be, when drained and worked up, of a lighter nature than his heavy corn lands; and he needed more light soil for roots) or when the weather chanced to be fine and he could see away down the broad river to where he knew the ocean met it, he thought how much better it would be to go down in that restless mass of water than to be boxed up and earthed into a grave. Not that this was either a new idea with him or that it was any indication of a latent morbidity coming to the front. It was only a mental trait that showed his natural restlessness and hatred of anything in the shape of confining circumstances. Hence it was no more than a touch of the inevitable that he should become worse tempered, more nervous and irritable and given to long fits of silence that leaned to moroseness, as time went by and he found himself more and more isolated owing to his action on the night when the Institute was opened and to his still maintained resolution to keep himself out of village affairs. During the first few weeks subsequent to that night practically everyone but Lucian, Dunstan, Jinglejoy, Mrs. Briggs and the Rectory folks tried again and again to persuade him to sink all differences and take his natural share in the doings of the Institute. Yet it was all to no good purpose. And Tamar, who was no longer made anything of by Mrs. Chapman and her sister-in-law, was even more persistent in this than she had been in other things, even to saying that his

burnt hands—now almost well again—were due to his stubbornness; till at last he felt that he almost hated her. Still, as he had hitherto done, he always gave her the best cuts at table, was sympathetic whenever she was indisposed by a cold or anything of that nature, and did at times thaw into his old genial self.

It was during this period that he and Lucian spent much more of their time together, and many a whole evening was given by them to private talk and silent reading in the study; where further inventions in labour-saving appliances in farming were discussed, worked out in theory and pushed towards practical utility. In fact, Lucian—who neither forgot that Ramsbottom was still on the scene, nor relaxed his attentions to 'Ola—was the only one with whom he would talk unreservedly of that Institute affair and kindred matters. It was on one of these nights, when Lucian had escorted 'Ola and Tamar to a village concert and returned to smoke and talk with Abe till the time arrived for him to return for them, that Abe referred to his young friend's attentions to 'Ola, assured him of his parental support and asked why he did not "bring the matter to a head before Ramsbottom did?" To this Lucian replied that, so far as he could see, such a decided action might precipitate matters against him. He was convinced that at the present time 'Ola did not know her own mind, and that the best course to follow was a waiting one in which there should be the requisite amount of attention, tinctured with a little of that independence which, he guessed, would act as a tonic to desire. There the matter ended—Abe knowing that anything in the shape of coercion on his part would only set 'Ola in the opposite direction.

Needless to say, perhaps, the young American fully agreed with him in his line of conduct—much to the occasional dissatisfaction of 'Ola, who, while admitting that her father had been very unfairly treated, blamed

him for entirely separating himself from the place that he had brought into existence. But this censure was rather selfish, inasmuch as it was chiefly due to her father's action in having taken Lucian's entertaining and organising abilities from those winter recreations which had now settled at the Institute; and so caused her and Tamar to lose this pleasure, because if he had still sung at the concerts or taken any part in the affairs there, 'Ola —and Tamar with her—would have had both an excuse for going and his escort to and fro. On the matter of Lucian's withdrawing his help, Abe had said, "Please yourself, my lad, and in that you'll please me." With the young man it was simply a question of loyalty to his friend and an expression of disgust at underhand work. And, of course, Jinglejoy had withdrawn his help, nor could Abe and all the others persuade him to the contrary. Thus the entertainment party had lost its two principals.

As to Abe's reasons for this separation: The chief motive was his ceaseless chagrin that, after all, this narrow-souled cleric—how narrow Abe had never guessed till this surprise had knocked him into a better understanding of the man, and at the same time an unjust judgment on him—had got the building completely into his own hands. To Abe this was a piece of flagrant robbing the villagers, and he could not so far sink his self-respect as to work with a person of that kind when his "rights and privileges had been taken from him to be perverted." Nor would he go to the length of making further trouble out of the matter. To his way of thinking, such an action would be mean and reprehensible in so far as it would lessen the value and usefulness of the Institute to the community. Neither would he—as some endeavoured to persuade him—have anything to do with a rival to the building and its purposes; because that, too, would be contemptible and would dwarf the scope of the

venture. No, he said, as the thing had started he would leave it to go on, and he kept his word. But, all the same, the situation was naturally one of annoyance to him day by day. And Tamar regularly made him worse; for she appeared to have become seized with a very spirit of interference that was none the less irritating because of its placidity. She had seldom seen his side of a dispute, and now more rarely saw it than ever; not because she *desired* to oppose him, but solely out of a narrow perversity and a doggedness to maintain what she considered to be the truth of the matter at issue. Whether that period in prison and its leading causes had developed the natural woman, or the conditions of her life at the Hall Farm had brought out a sort of forced growth in her, neither he nor she stopped to ask. In the little thought that 'Ola gave to the matter, she did Tamar the most justice on this point. Abe saw only the persistence of her irritating opposition and her "iron-rail sort of attitude" towards the innumerable things with which she did not agree. While she had rigidly refused to play up to him in any of his enthusiasms and contentions, he had as stubbornly held to his own more rugged yet interesting interpretation of life. All the same Tamar was far from being either callous or selfish intentionally; and both Abe and 'Ola knew this; also that she was, in her silent way, solicitous for his welfare; but it was a solicitousness which he now began to resent.

Abe did not see that in throwing the whole thing up and retiring in what appeared to be dudgeon he was playing into the hands of the Rector; who, on the night of the rumpus, had afterwards assured the audience that "the whole unfortunate matter resulted from a mistake that was, he grieved to think, unalterable and for which no one was really to blame. But he had offered no details in explanation. On the contrary, he was glad that Abe had not gone into particulars of the matter. And, as a

sop to Cerberus, he had assured his listeners that although the building belonged to the Church it would still be devoted to all the purposes for which it had been designed and erected. The effect of all this being a general quietening down, out of which had come the idea, growing with the passing weeks and months, that Farmer Shuttleworth had not hardly behaved as he ought to have done. For some time the Rector and his wife were anxious lest Abe should take the matter up, insist on an inquiry, lay the whole truth bare and upset everything; and when this was no longer feared the affair became completely a thing of the past to them. Naturally enough Mrs. Chapman, being much the ruling partner, had guided her husband amongst these rocks and shoals; so that when it was all over he did not even make that quiet reference of his to the "Unfortunate remark to Mr. Pinch Jellie."

As to Pinch—he soon learnt to know the wages of a servile tool. Slowly but increasingly neglected by the Rectory party, except when members of it came in contact with him in the Institute, on which occasions they by-and-bye treated him in quite an ordinary manner; with a barrier in the way of his going to feast his eyes and senses on Tamar; and twitted now and then in the village by such remarks as "Pinch the pincher," "Who pinched the Institute from us to give to the church?" and the like; he was far from being in that state of mental comfort and social circumstances for which he had looked forward as the reward of his astuteness, service and his "snug little fortune." His admittance to the inner freemasonry of the Rectory folks he gave up as a lost cause entirely; and, as his desires were now pulling him more strongly to the Hall Farm than in any other direction, he allowed his thoughts to linger there till at last he mustered up enough effrontery to get himself into the finest feathers he had and take his way there

on one bright afternoon in mid-December, and with a double purpose in his mind. But it is not to be supposed that there was any bravery in this. Allowing for his general make up, his past life and his size Mr. P. J. was not exactly a coward; yet his courage was the result of sheer bravado and a curious sort of ignorance, not of will power working against a pressing knowledge of the danger of the situation. And that which drew him down to the Hall Farm, after three whole weeks without a glimpse of Tamar, was a feeling that required no bravery for its advancement. He would see her, "tell her the whole truth of the mistake," get her to tell Abe and—well, to see her. He knew very well that if he came upon the big farmer in a bad moment he would be as likely to have his ears boxed as to get a civil word. But it was quite the wrong time of day to find Abe at home. Besides, as Pinch went down the road he met Jinglejoy and asked if "Mr. Shuttleworth was about the house." The reply was "Noa," accompanied by a sharp glance from the old man's oblique eye. Not satisfied with this, he put the same question to Simmons, who was driving out of the farmyard with a load of winter fodder for sheep; and finding the coast clear he sailed straight in, swinging his malacca cane, his little head seeming to be smaller than ever in contrast to the thick astrachan collar on his overcoat, and he generally showing all the jauntiness of the cocksure in a time of safety.

Yes, Tamar would see the little man; there was no particular reason why she shouldn't, though what he wanted to see her about she couldn't understand. 'Ola thought it would not be wise to detain him, because if her father should come across him on the premises something might happen.

But, then, as Tamar was aware, 'Ola's present mood was not one of her best ones. The truth being that just after dinner Ramsbottom had called, on his way to Mal-

don, to ask if he could drive her over or do any shopping for her. She wanted some purchases made badly, but not such as she could entrust to him; and, owing to her natural sense of justice and her dislike to paining Lucian, also to a hint on the subject given to her by her father on the previous evening, she had refused the offer—and, except when she thought of Lucian, been wholly sorry for it ever since.

So "the little man" was admitted, and Tamar went to him in the parlour—where he stood a little to one side of the fire-place, one foot across the other and resting on its toe; he, propped up by the malacca, with his hand as a cushion between its buckhorn handle and the back of his hip; his stylish "bowler" in the left hand, and his whole manner and appearance seeming to say—not in all his glory was Solomon arrayed like this. Besides, underneath that natural covering of irresponsible indifference to all things alike, Pinch was in tremendous earnestness; only it was neither his policy nor his make to let this be seen. Hence when Tamar invited him to sit down, said what a long time it was since they had enjoyed the pleasure of seeing him and politely asked why he had called, he opened up the subject of his share in "the blunder" of the Institute not being the property of the village. But, of course, he did not walk into it in this blunt manner. Pinch had a weak hand to play with; in fact, it was a hand with a solitary poor trump, and he was quite aware of that. So, with all the show he could make of having something important to say, he began with a stated assumption of his innocence; then started off on a long roundabout mixture of story, supposition and irrelevant matter of which Tamar presently grew weary and occasionally suspicious. The truth was that now brought face-to-face with the difficulty of expressing his actuating motive, being somewhat overawed by the dominating personality of Tamar and feeling a sort of

impudent presumptuousness in aspiring to the favours of such a woman, he now and then stumbled up to the matter in a way that at last made Tamar see what appeared to her to be a decidedly cloven hoof. But it was only the circumstances of the case and his unrehearsed blundering with them that made him show what he did not really mean.

Anyhow, it startled Tamar into a sudden uprising; that fulness at the ends of her lips coming into prominence; her handsome figure swelling with indignation; her greeny-grey eyes looking a sort of hot-cold anger of inquiry, that shot down on him at an angle of some thirty-five degrees, and was emphasised by that touch of premature grey at the temples, and she exclaiming a question as to what he meant. Flustered by this, and in a way disarmed and incapacitated by the very blunder he was making, he worsened the situation by an appeal to her kindness "not to be hard on a man whose only fault was affection." With a freezing kind of glance at his dandyship, Tamar turned on her heel and made for the doorway, with all the dignity that a pair of chilblained feet would allow—Pinch close behind her all the time, spluttering explanations and avowals, till, just by the door, he put a detaining hand on her shoulder. As if it was something that burnt, she flung it off, half-twisting "the little man" around with the vehemency of her action and banging his hand painfully against the edge of the door. Then into the passage she stalked, still icily, and onward—he there all the way, begging to be heard, etc. —until the drop of two stone steps brought her into the big, tiled kitchen, where 'Ola and Mercy were at work. In his eagerness to keep close to her, and be heard without raising his voice much above an undertone, his whole seven stone odd came down in one patent-leather shoe on the bottom of her skirt—and rip! went the gathers at her waist. The instant before this happened he had

put out his hand again to her shoulder, he being now desperate at their entering the presence of others; and at that very moment Abe (who had been told by Simmons of "the Lady's" presence and had returned home in consequence) entered the kitchen by its outer door, saw the torn skirt and the outstretched hand, heard Tamar fire out something about a "vile little wretch," and thought the whole affair to be something a hundred times worse than what it was. With no hesitation whatever he strode straight across under the low ceiling, took Pinch Jellie by his astrachan collar and began to haul him, not silently, across the kitchen floor. On the table, however, lay a large butter-bat, a sight of which gave Abe a new inspiration. Still holding the dandy, like a struggling schoolboy, with one hand, Abe reached a chair from the end of the table and sat on it. Then (while 'Ola and Mercy looked on, in expectant wonderment, from where they had first stood, Tamar, holding her torn frock up behind her, surveyed the scene from the step where the unintentional damage was done) he took "the little man" in both hands, placed him stomach downwards over his left knee, put the other big leg over Pinch's two small ones, held the carefully brushed head down by that iron grip on the huge collar, turned up the two coats and seized the butter-bat. At this point the women saw what was to happen; and while two of them turned their heads away to hide their smiles and Tamar stood stiffly watching it all, Abe brought down the bat so often and so vigorously that (as Mercy told Amariah and the pair of them told the village) "Mr. P. J. wouldn't be able to sit down in comfort for a week." Of the latter's struggles, shouts for help and expostulations generally Abe took not a whit of notice. When he had satisfied himself in this manner he threw the bat on the table and walked outside, with Pinch kicking under his arm, and 'Ola calling out, "Don't do him any violence, father!"

Abe replied that he "never did any harm to a hobbledehoy in his life," and walked to the yard pump; where, in full sight of the three faces at the window and Simmons—who was again loading his cart with chopped turnips—he held the dandy with one hand while he worked the pump-handle with the other "till there wasn't a dry rag on his body." Then, sore, soaked and saddened grievously, "the little man" at last stood free, a most pitiable object that was far from suggesting a "lady."

"Now you can get about your business," said Abe, "and the sooner you're gone the better for yourself." Pinch shiveringly spluttered something about "having the law for this outrage." "If you're not off my premises in three minutes I'll throw you into the pond," was the stern reply, and out came Abe's watch to mark the time. Pinch gave a rapid look at the face of his castigator and asked for his "property."

"Your time's going fast," came the warning.

"Well, give me my hat and stick, then, and let me go."

Seeing that these must be in the house, Abe turned and called for the articles. Mercy brought them out and gave them to their owner. The moment they were in his hand, Abe said to him, "Now I'll give you a minute and a half to get off my ground, which means that you'll have to run or take the pond. Off!" Abe looked at his watch; and Pinch took to his heels, cane and hat in one hand, the other holding the great water-logged coat free of his legs, and each foot coming down with a slock, slock sort of sound that spoke of much water and a pair of ruined patent-leathers. He did the sprint within time, then stood on public ground to shout back threats of what he would do. Heedless of these Abe went indoors to learn the beginning of the matter; leaving the spoiled dandy to squelch his way back to the village; shivering from head to foot and being repeatedly stopped by inquirers who

wanted to know what had happened to him. And all for meaning no harm, only blundering in the tale he had gone to tell!

For some weeks afterwards Pinch Jellie was loud in his determination to "bring that bullying farmer to book by having the law on him." But as time went by, and he was assured again and again that he "hadn't a leg to stand on," these expressions of retaliation grew less and less, till at length it came to be a joke to ask him when he intended to "fetch that summons on Mr. Shuttleworth?"

So Christmas again passed, even quieter than the previous one had been spent. Abe, who had been put on the Committee of the Essex Agricultural Society, paid out the bonus to his workers, according to promise, cast up his year's work and found himself satisfactorily to the good. In other matters there was no change till the beginning of February, then occurred something that showed how the wind was blowing between 'Ola and Lucian. On a particularly mild afternoon (the tail-end of that winter being so open that Abe was already hard at work in putting his spring grain into the earth, as he had put in the heavier Autumn kind, by the means of Lucian's improved drill, for which a patent had been obtained; as was the case with a new plough that Lucian had made adaptable for deep or light work), Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling made a call at the Hall Farm. This was so unusual that both 'Ola and Tamar were prepared to hear some very surprising news. But the would-be "Dame" was there on another errand; although she did manage to say, before taking her leave, that old Simmons had just found Mrs. Moyle dead at the bottom of a newly-made grave; and that apparently "the woman" had fallen into it when "worse for liquor" on the previous night. On that evening a "first-class select" concert was to be held at the Institute, all the singers hav-

ing been obtained from Maldon and Witham; but two of them, and apparently the best two, had just telegraphed to say that they could not attend—one because of a cold and the other owing to being called away.

"And don't you see," said the big woman, after making her announcement, and still panting under the pressure of her expensive furs, "if we cannot get someone to take their place, or at least one of them, and someone who is as good as the others, I'm afraid—well, there, what will five singers be for all the evening? Because they are all singing three or four songs each, and we can't ask them to sing any more!" and she gave Tamar a curious, short, sidelong, questioning and hardly noticed glance, the while her mind shot off to "that rumour" about this quiet woman.

"But I don't see how we can help you," remarked 'Ola.

"Oh, yes, you can, dear. There's Mr. Kingdom—surely he will sing, if *you* ask him!"

Not quite liking the way in which Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling put this matter and remembering her past private failures in the same direction, 'Ola said she would "speak to him"; but, candidly, she held out no hope of success. Seeing here an opportunity of either bringing matters to a more definite condition between 'Ola and Lucian, or widening the breach so as to let Ramsbottom right into it, Tamar (who was still of the opinion that if 'Ola was only out of the way, Abe would marry her, either under moral compulsion or the force of the situation) lent her persuasion to that of the messenger.

"But why not ask Jinglejoy?—I'm sure he can sing as well as any of the strangers," was 'Ola's subterfuge.

"Oh, my dear!" and up went Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling's large hands. "This is a high-class affair!—you forget! The other two gentlemen will sing in evening dress and the ladies, too, I expect. So how can we ask a rough

farm-labourer to go an' sing with them?—and that awful eye, too!"

"His eye! Whoever thinks of his eye where our dear old Jinglejoy is concerned? Why, he's the sweetest old man that ever lived!—a baby couldn't be much sweeter!" exclaimed 'Ola, who was up in a moment if anything in the nature of a reflection happened to be cast on the gently-disposed old man.

"Yes, dear, I know; but, then, you see—well, of course, you know I didn't mean anything wrong; but——" And so the excuse continued till 'Ola was mollified. Then Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling went her way, puffing under her weight of ultra-fashionable wraps, complaining at the mildness of the weather, saying how thankful they ought to be that it was so fine, vigorously assuring 'Ola—in a way that was meant to be motherly but was rather offensive—that she expected to see her "walk in with Mr. Kingdom," smilingly admiring the girl's complexion, declaring envy at her good health—forgetful of having so often boasted that she had never been ill—and thinking that "the chit might have treated her with more respect to her age and that"; the "that" being indefinitely costly furs and money. As she passed the corner of Jonas's cottage, just where the gate opened into the mill-yard, Amariah appeared with a basket of clothes to hang out; and the big woman turned away her head, in a disgust that was enough to smack the face of the miller's daughter.

"Oh, you needn't be so mighty fine an' grand an' all that! I'll bet you was no better once—p'r'aps many a time!" said Amariah, in sudden anger at that "wallop" of contempt, which she knew to be aimed at her "condition"—a state of affairs that had been secretly in Amariah's mind on the night when the Institute was opened, she knowing that it would bring her "into the black books of the Rectory party soon as it leaked out."

Galling, hard to bear and in a degree unjust as this accusation was, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling repressed her strong inclination to reply and continued onward, secure in the feeling that "to rap out would be derogatory to a lady of her appearance and position." So that Amariah had to turn unrelieved to her hanging-out matter, knowing that she had now "no character in the place"; and only the satisfaction that, owing to his lax ideas of morality and his "business" attitude towards life in general, her father would not turn her out of doors.

It was expected that Lucian would be in to tea that evening, because he and Abe were preparing for the lambing season, in a sheltered meadow further down the road; and when he happened to be in that direction he usually called for tea on his way to Mrs. Briggs's. But on this occasion he did not, for the following reason: Owing to an unfair condition which the elder Cawpkin had tried to impose in the matter of the grass land that was to have been bought from him by Abe, the latter had refused to complete the transaction; and Cawpkin had issued a writ on the ground that Abe had prevented him from selling the land to another would-be customer. The writ had arrived that morning, and in the afternoon Abe, who had been elsewhere during the earlier half of the day, talked the matter over with Lucian; with the result, that instead of accompanying Abe to tea, he went on to the village to telegraph a message to his friend's solicitors in Chelmsford. When Abe appeared at the tea table, 'Ola asked him where Lucian was.

"Gone to send a wire for me," said he, with his mind on the writ; "he'll be here presently."

Thus the meal passed over; and Abe quickly went out about some of his cattle, after which he returned indoors and shut himself in his study.

It was after six o'clock when Lucian arrived, and the concert was to begin at seven. 'Ola had always been

fond of these winter-evening recreations in the village, especially during the time that Lucian lent his entertaining and organising abilities to them; and, helped forward in the matter by Tamar during the latter part of the afternoon, she had almost made herself believe that he would be sure to give in this time. In fact, she had imagined herself walking into the Institute virtually in charge of the only reinforcements that could save the situation—a sort of Blucher to the rescue, and proud of being so, as she secretly was of his abilities as an entertainer and of his mental powers generally. When he appeared, she was dressed ready to go, thinking to hurry him back to the village; then announce his coming at the Institute, whilst he went to his lodgings to dress. He, noting how carefully and becoming she was attired, and that Tamar was still in her stay-at-home clothes, asked if her father was in the study.

"Yes," said she; then at once stated her case.

"But you know, just, that I'm right out of all that now," he replied, looking into the unusual brilliance of her eyes, which could be so gentle and sympathetic on occasions; and thinking that she was growing to be even more lovely as the months went by.

"Yes, I know you have been; but this is a special occasion. And I think you ought to put your dislike aside at such a time," she remarked, smiling enough to show that dimple in the right cheek; which, he had often told her, Nature had put there for love to nestle in.

He sighed within himself, saying, "Believe me, I'm mighty sorry that it can't be. Besides, your father and I have some pressing business to talk over to-night."

During the past six months or so he had dropped many of his Americanisms; but when it suited her purpose to do so she still teased him on that score, and, turning partially away, she rejoined, "Oh, I guess that can wait."

"No," was the quietly serious answer, "I guess it can't."

"Well, then come to please me." And about she turned again, every nerve alive, her whole attitude and being expressing her words and seeming to say—can you refuse me now?

For a few moments he gazed at her in profound admiration, his eyes looking all the love that a self-controlled man ever felt; while Tamar sat aside, stitching, watching with veiled interest, and keeping out of the affair as a matter of policy.

"Yes," said he, "of course, I'll take you up there and fetch you home when it's over." This was what he or Abe had done since the Institute opened, whether she went alone or was accompanied by Tamar, and whether Ben was with them or not. "But—just a minute, till I see your father," he added.

He was moving away when she pulled him up with, "No, I want you to come and sing to please me."

He smiled, more as a necessity than as an expression of what he felt; for he saw plainly that unless he worked the matter very carefully the upshot would be one of hurt and annoyance on her part and consequent pain on his. During that winter he had often seen her in the same mood and knew what it meant. Therefore he replied, "Jove, you know, I believe you would tempt St. Anthony some!"

Not to be appeased in this manner, however, 'Ola repeated, as she picked up her hat and went towards an old oval mirror in a gilt frame, "Will you come, as I ask?"

He knew by the decisiveness of her tone that her mood was changing. Already she was piqued at his non-compliance with her request; so he changed his tactics and answered "I guess you'll believe me when I say it gives me a pretty good deal of pain to say no——"

"Fiddle"— in the mirror by which she was adjusting her hat, she was watching his face.

"But you know as well as I do, that my principles are in question here——"

"Fiddlesticks——"

"You know precisely that I've said I won't lend a hand there in any way till they make some reparation to your father."

"Fiddle, I tell you."

"Come now," he resumed, genuine regret in his voice and face, "be just, some. Would you have me break my word and—allow me." She was putting on her jacket, and he stepped forward, with his hands out to help her; but she backed, keeping her face towards him and saying,

"No—if you won't do as I want, you shan't do as you want." He paused, looking a sorrow that he must not speak.

"Will you come and sing?" she asked, giving a sort of finality ring to the words.

"I can't, 'Ola," he answered in a low tone, her name being, as she knew, an indication of what he felt.

At that instant Ben Ramsbottom walked in, glanced at 'Ola and Lucian—who still had his hat in hand—and said, "Are you coming to the concert?"

"Yes, come along," 'Ola immediately replied, and went straight out of the room, with Ben at once at her heels, he thinking that Lucian would follow them there and then.

It was all done in a moment. Deeply hurt and equally angry at her failure, 'Ola, in a sheer fit of pique, had done what no one would have persuaded her to do in a more gentle mood. And there Lucian stood, in a quandary as to what course he should pursue, till he felt that it was too late and would be out of place to go after them. Meanwhile Tamar, whose chilblain-ridden feet would

not allow of her going so far as the village on foot, eyed him furtively, and reflected that so long as matters kept as they were between 'Ola and Ben, the latter would maintain a still tongue on those Yorkshire happenings.

Then Lucian turned on his heel and went to the study, feeling that he would like to swear, break something, or have the gloves on for a little while with Ramsbottom. As he entered the room, Abe looked up, saw the clock at the same moment and said:

"You haven't taken 'Ola to the concert by this time?"

"No."

"Then you had better hurry up—hadn't you?—or she'll be late."

"She's gone."

"What, alone?"

"No, Ramsbottom has gone with her," and, at Abe's request, he explained the situation.

"M'm," Abe commented, "that being so it would be hardly the thing for you to fetch her home—rather make you cheap—feel sheepish. No, I'll do that. Did you send off the wire?"

"Yes," Lucian said, feeling a little relieved as to 'Ola. "And Mrs. Briggs tells me that Cawpkin has borrowed money from Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling for the action."

"The devil, he has!"

"I don't know precisely how true it is; and Mrs. Briggs is mighty close as to how she knows, but she never says a thing like that unless she does know."

"No, there's no fooling with her—wish to the Lord that every woman had as much sense! As for Mrs. H.-T. ——M'm, well, no, I'm not much surprised."

Then they took to discussing the writ—whether Abe should fight it out, or offer to pay the costs so far and buy the land. In the end, prompted by what he consid-

ered to be underhand work both by Cawpkin and Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, he decided on the former course; after which they walked up to the village together, and Abe conducted 'Ola home—but not before telling Ben that he need not trouble to go with them.

IV

It was about this time that both 'Ola and Lucian were drawn to notice, unusually, two outstanding points in Abe's composition—two that grew rapidly into prominence in the weeks and months immediately subsequent to the opening of the Institute. Not that a word passed between them on these matters; nor that their thoughts were much alike. Brain and temperamental differences naturally led, by ways that touched at times then went apart, to conclusions which were dissimilar yet akin. Of course, the moving agency in both their cases was to be found in Abe himself—in the aggregate and general tendency of his doings at this time. He was growing more nervous and ill-tempered week by week. To Lucian, and sometimes to 'Ola, he complained of an increasing sleeplessness. He flatly refused to believe that the Rector had not connived with Pinch Jellie as to the Institute affair; and because no offer was made—owing to Mrs. Chapman's influence on her husband—to revert to Abe's original design, he held that he was quite right in his contention. All the Rector had done was to maintain that the matter was a mistake and leave it there. Hence there was no coming and going between the two houses. Lucian agreed with him, as did some other persons; 'Ola hardly knew what to believe, but leaned to her father's side; while Tamar persistently said in her quiet way that it was a mistake, and that Abe ought to see it was. To her opinion on the matter he made no comment; but he was ever at variance with some one. As a protest to what he considered to be the Rector's "back-handed work"

he would take no public part in local affairs. He had resigned every office to which he had been elected, partially because they took him more or less into contact with the Rector. He could hardly go through the village or meet a prominent neighbour without having an argument, mostly finding himself on the losing side yet showing that he thought his opponents were afflicted with something in the nature of idiocy. When he chanced to meet a familiar donor to the building fund and asked why he had not been told of the written statement and receipt as to the money being for "a church building," he was told that the giver had thought he (Abe) and Mr. Chapman had so agreed, because the money was collected in their names; or that the donor had given his money and thought no more about it, or knew nothing of the original intention. Still Abe looked on it all as a piece of what he considered to be his "growing ill-luck." Always a gospeller in the creed of strenuousness, he was still—as he had ever been—preaching the gospel of sanity, under the name of commonsense, when he was, and with much appearance of truth, being talked of as one "going mad."

What with these features in his life, his being really worried and far too often angered seriously by strings of small matters which would not have touched him in the old healthier days, it was painfully evident to Lucian that a deep-seated change was taking place in Abe; to 'Ola the change was made, not in the making; that was where they differed. Nor was this two-headed idea lessened by the fact that in quiet moments, brief occasions nowadays when he felt disposed to talk generally and would tackle almost any human subject that cropped up, he would argue as clearly, talk as conclusively, see as sanely as any man could. In fact, it appeared as if in these times he was blest with such a clarity of vision, of even profound depth of real intellect and such humaneness of purpose and outlook as seemed to typify the ab-

normal clearness of air and the searching qualities of pale opal light which so often immediately precede a sudden tempest of wind and rain. Again that great fondness of his for young boys and girls had become more marked as the months had gone by; from which temperamental trait to the killing of her infant was a line of deductive thought that never occurred to Tamar. To Lucian all this, except the last point, was much more apparent than it was to 'Ola, for the simple reason that his mental equipment was different from hers; and had they discussed the matter, he would have been careful not to let her see his fear, nor even his thought, that this mental vividness was possibly the non-indicative prelude of a deplorable storm of another kind. While 'Ola gave much thought to these conflicting phases of her father's condition, but reached no further than themselves and the present; and Tamar thought of them merely as 'Ola did in part—as an outcome of those long evenings of riot, short nights of rest and early mornings of work in the flying years up north, now added to and accentuated by local opposition, misunderstandings and plans frustrated—whilst they thus followed their own trains of thought, now and then slightly touching on them to each other, Lucian's was: Why is light given to a man whom fate, circumstances, or whatever it be has hedged in like this? He can see the light, as few men can; he knows what to do, should be done, when his mind is not disturbed; but his temperament—no, these sudden inclinations, this upsetting irritability, so often run counter to his knowledge that they are making him do the wrong thing from day to day, although he has seen the right thing to do only the day before. Thus Lucian was asking himself what it meant —where lay the cause of it all? So scrappy was his knowledge of his friend's past life that, while it seemed to be a fairly connected chain of pieces, the Yorkshire episode was an entirely missing chapter. And it was here

that Lucian was at fault; for, owing in part to 'Ola's injunctions to Ramsbottom to say nothing of that unhappy affair and in part to the fact of there being a sort of friendly rivalry between them, the young men had never wandered even to the verge of exchanging confidences.

The other point of interest that occurred to the minds of 'Ola and Lucian, and was not unknown to Tamar, was his great proneness to be actuated by femininity, even while expressing himself in a way that would make a stranger think he had an eastern attitude of mind towards women,—providing always that he had no dislike to the person. Indeed, it was his boast that he went through life no more affected by women than what it pleased him to be from time to time. Irrespective of that assertion, however, and independently of the fact that he had always been one who hated to be at variance with any womenfolk for whom he had affection, admiration or respect, and was therefore actuated by them in a secondary yet quite effective manner—it was a subject of note and speculation to his daughter and to his friend that now, when his mind was set against most men about him and theirs against him, he was noticeably eager for the good opinion of certain women, such as 'Ola, Mrs. Briggs, Miss Scopes, who had lately contracted a hard cough that shook her little frame severely, Mrs. Moriety and two or three others, and to make them see and agree with his conduct and conclusions. To Tamar he seemed to turn for nothing. Whether she was present or not he stated his views all the same, but never directly asked her opinion on them; if she offered any, which was but seldom when others were present, it was chiefly a matter of chance whether or not he accepted them. This she noticed closely enough; for where Abe was concerned no one was more observant than herself in certain ways. What she did, and appeared to be unable to see the foolishness of, was to follow him on such occasions, or bide

her time, and corner him in private; the tragedy being that in nine times out of ten it was with some opposition that annoyed him by its paltriness, or some reproving advice where the advice would have been good without the reproof, or when he was already in an irritable condition. An outcome of this—now growing to be so common, alas! because Tamar's persistency on a set course never knew abatement—was that, instead of turning on her, as many men would have done, he heard her sullenly, spoke briefly or not at all, then invariably went out and was speedily at loggerheads with some other person; or took himself to the fields—to "the brown earth, the green turf, God's sky and His birds, where there was peace, and more than peace." Of this fundamental cause in his friend's growing derangement, Lucian knew next to nothing. Of course, 'Ola knew something of it, and guessed at much more, and might have told more of it to Lucian had it not been for the widening breach between them.

Perhaps the most curious part of it all was the way in which a semblance of the truth filtered through to the village. For it had grown to be whispered there that "Farmer Shuttleworth was going mad" and that "the silent woman" had more to do with it than she ought to have. Of course, there were Simmons, the other farm hands and Amariah—who had often worked in the house before her disgrace became known—to "see broken shells and guess eggs." So that, although Jinglejoy, Mercy, Jonas and Dunstan—all of whom were regularly about the place—would not think of "opening their mouths to fill others" on a subject of that sort, there was still a free channel for such things. And it was here, when this rumour became a fairly accepted matter amongst the villagers generally, together with one of a more sinister nature, that the unstable quantity known as public opinion veered about and took Abe out of the pillory of condemnation and put Tamar into his place. Not that either

of them knew of this. The isolation in which they now lived, Tamar and 'Ola in a rather less degree, and the natural secretiveness of the East Anglian peasant were quite enough to prevent their hearing rumours that were confined to cottages, with now and then a veiled reference in "snug," or a talk in open fields. Two other reasons for this change of front on the part of Abe's humble supporters in the past were the facts that the Rector was already departing from his promise that the Institute should be devoted to the purposes for which it was originally designed, and that "the Squire" who had apparently given up all thought of "nursing the constituency"—was threatening to enclose some common land; neither of which, as the villagers knew, would have come about quietly if Abe had still been "with them." So that in contemplating these changes and with the rumours as fingerposts, the adverse opinion of the village generally, with certain exceptions which were either more broad-minded or difficult to move for personal reasons, swung around and fastened hard on Tamar. And this was the condition of things in connection with the Hall Farm when there happened an accident which gave colour and consolidation to the rumour that "the silent woman" was at the bottom of this "madness" on the part of the village's former friend and champion. There was a sudden recollection of that general warm-heartedness of his, which had further and in a shorter time penetrated that East Anglian aloofness of theirs than any other "man from the shires" had ever been known to accomplish.

It was the afternoon of the third day subsequent to the concert. Abe had returned to the house for something, and Tamar had seized the opportunity—her first one—to complain of the way in which he had relieved Ben of conducting 'Ola home. Tamar had heard of this from 'Ola on that very night, when the latter was still smart-

ing under what she considered to be the indignity of having her escort sent unceremoniously about his business. Ben had called, two days after the affair, he not having had courage enough to call sooner, and freshened up the matter by a fuller recital. Then Tamar had seen a danger of his tongue being set loose by Abe's brusque treatment of him, and had lain in wait for the present occasion.

Abe was in the study, making some notes on the Cawpkin action, when she went to him and opened fire with, in that curiously reproving style of hers, "Don't you think it was very foolish of you to speak to Ben as you did when you fetched 'Ola home the other night?" He heard quite well what she said; but, as he usually did on such occasions, he pretended not to have heard her. After waiting a few moments she repeated her remark, making worse of it in the repetition.

Now he raised his head, looked sideways at her and asked, "What's the matter now? Can't a man fetch his own daughter home, and say with whom she shall walk over lonely roads and fields after dark and with whom she shan't?"

"Yes; but he can speak as a gentleman to the one who is escorting her," was the icy reply.

"As a gentle-be-hanged! You've got too many of those butter-me-nicely ideas in these days, Tamar. Take my advice, get back to your old ways a bit more—they're far more acceptable to me." And he turned again to what he was doing.

That was a common complaint of his on such occasions and one that always stung her, because she read into it a meaning which was different from his; but he was ignorant of both these facts, for the reason that Tamar was never given to explain what she thought another should know as well as she did.

"But you surely don't mean to say that you don't re-

member one thing," she rejoined, with an involuntary because inherent air of surprised superiority.

"What thing?"

"That we must be civil to Ben at all times." Surely, she thought, he would not need to be reminded that Ben was none too respectful to her at times.

"I don't know any obligation that I should be extra civil to one for whom I've no particular respect, and I never had much of that for a young waster. It would look a lot better of him to go home and do some work, instead of idling his time away here. I don't know whether you see it or not, but I do—Ben's not what he used to be."

Tamar was equally aware that the young man had become more flippant and apparently less honest generally than what he had been in former years. Yet that was not a point for discussion at the moment; so she replied, "But you forget, surely."

"Forget what?" he asked impatiently.

"That if we give him cause to be offended he may talk of what took place up yonder," was her answer, made in that placidly accusative manner of hers.

Abe was on the point of saying that for all he cared to the contrary Ben could tell all he knew; but, at the thought of how such a scandal would rake 'Ola in with it, and of the seeming brutality of such an assertion, he checked it, and replied in a sort of guilty, yet not guilty way, "I wasn't uncivil to him; for all I said was that I'd take 'Ola home and I wanted no young fellow to dance attendance on her without my leave."

"And I should call that very uncivil."

"Oh, yes, *you* would, of course. But then, you see, I'm neither superfine, starched nor ironed out," said he, petulantly.

"Perhaps not, and it might be better for some of us and for you if you were a little more so," she remarked frigidly.

"Oh, would it? And better if I wore nicer ties and smarter clothes and never went to table singing a snatch of song, and learnt French and became generally artificial like—oh, damn such ill-timed, pettifogging interference!"

And throwing his papers down in a rage, he stalked past her—she staring at him in the old icy astonishment on such occasions—out of the room, muttering and swearing, through the morning room, and along the passage to the kitchen, on the top step of which he slipped and went heavily to the stone floor below. The noise brought Mercy running in from the dairy beyond, where she had been working at Abe's experiments in producing the "Essex deeps"; with Dunstan to turn the press and help generally, to whom Abe had grown into the habit of giving as much odd-work as the other's small-holding would allow him to undertake. Mercy's cry of alarm as she entered fetched Dunstan at her heels, and they hurried to Abe together.

"Easy," said the latter, as they made to lift him up, "there's something wrong with my left leg. Fetch Miss 'Ola, Mercy. Dunstan, take my left boot off please. . . . There, that's better; the leg's broken, I believe, down here somewhere." He was feeling along the bone about six inches above his ankle. "Help me along to that arm-chair—that's it, you carry the leg."

And, by the aid of his hands on the floor and the use of his right foot, back-downwards all the time, he began a slow march to the chair at the fireside. In the midst of this in ran Mercy with 'Ola, whom she had found upstairs; but he would have no further help at that moment—he was doing all right, he said. When in the chair, with the injured leg resting on another seat, he sent Dunstan to see if Lucian was about and asked 'Ola to get some broad bandages. Here came Tamar, who had remained in the study, making matters more precise there; and for whom, it was afterwards remembered, he had not

sent anyone. He disregarded her now; but that made no difference to Tamar; for the instant that 'Ola entered with the half of an old sheet, a minute or two after herself, Tamar took it, tore off a strip and proceeded to bind it deftly around Abe's leg—which she had already examined in a way—the while she directed 'Ola to prepare other bandages. To this Abe surrendered, as he always did under kindred circumstances, without grace; and half expostulating with such remarks as, "Now 'Ola can do that quite well enough," followed by a wince and a hard setting of the jaws, showing the pain he felt. As the task was about finished Dunstan appeared with Lucian, and Tamar began to give him instructions to go and borrow a saddle horse, on which to ride for a certain doctor in a large village some three miles away, when Abe interrupted with,

"Do nothing of the sort.—Put that white-fetlocked mare into the dog-cart—the one that came yesterday, Lu',—I think she can travel—and bring Dr. Wing back with you. I wouldn't have the other man in the house. And if Wing isn't in, leave word for him to come on as soon as he comes in; and say I've broken my leg, then he'll know what to bring. Then drive on to Maldon, and bring back a medium-sized saddle. For the future we'll have one on the premises, ready for when it's wanted—and have no borrowing."

Lucian hurried off, and the end of the day saw Abe in bed, with his broken leg set, and he inclined to forbid Tamar to enter the room. But he said nothing, except to Lucian when the latter sat with him during the evenings. Whilst in the village it was said that she had pushed him down the steps, he privately blamed her for his accident, because he would not have gone hurrying away from the study as he did had it not been for her "worrying" him. And during the five weeks he spent there—all through the lambing season, which was a mat-

ter of much concern to him—he blamed her a thousand times for the mental condition that was now beginning to attract his own attention. Not that he forgot himself in this, because it was not his nature to do so. On the contrary, his first condemnation was on himself, as it always was except in the very heat of anger. On the whole he still took her presence in the house, to end which he felt morally unable, as his just punishment for the past. What he held her completely responsible for, and what so utterly and in a way irrationally annoyed him, was her everlasting petty fault-finding and opposition of opinion. Not knowing this and in a degree heedless of his almost silent treatment of her, she attended him whilst he lay in bed—saw to his bodily complaint, food and that—about as much as any woman could; for that was largely a part of her nature. In fact it was in a case like this where the best points of her femininity came to the front, which were those contained in the phrase "looking after the man." But neither it nor his condition made any difference to those unfortunate efforts of hers to make him what he was not and to rule him in ways where he would not be ruled. One pretty frequent cause of friction during this time was her autocratic habit of keeping back dainties left for him by Mrs. Briggs—who utterly declined to believe any rumour about Abe and Tamar conjointly—old Varley, or sent by Mrs. Moriety with Jonas. Not that she was at all jealous of Mrs. Briggs; her feeling for that practical person was one of superior and silent indifference. And this was mainly her attitude towards the homely but appetising delicacies that Mrs. Briggs took or sent for the invalid.

Although Lucian was in and about the house more than usual during these weeks the breach between him and 'Ola seemed to be widening. Apparently unable to forgive him for his steadfast refusal to be won round to her

way of thinking in the matter of the village entertainments, and seeming to be drawn more and more to Ben, she had grown into the habit of treating him exactly as she did during his first few months with them. The truth was that 'Ola had been so much accustomed to having her own way, that Lucian's declining to fall into line was a serious affront to her. For, with all her other graces and her general practicality, 'Ola was essentially feminine; and what she saw first and paramount was the refusal to please her where so little was at stake. And, so far as Ben was concerned, it appeared to be pretty certain that her father's action on the night of the "high-class" concert had set her off in sheer opposition to his wishes—an opposition that Tamar naturally fostered with all her placid and seemingly unmeaning care. In truth a real change was taking place in 'Ola. On the one hand she was constantly and seriously asking herself if she had not done wrong by encouraging Lucian, as she had deliberately done during the past twelve months; and on the other her father's condition of mind was weighing so heavily on her as to give her an almost continually set seriousness, through which Lucian often tried to break and as often failed, finding himself set back in a manner that decidedly affected his optimism. It was now that he blamed himself most for dallying so much with his chances during the happy days of the past summer, and saw that he would ruin them completely by putting them to the test now. Meanwhile it was all too apparent that his rival was slowly making headway. Then Lucian took in the news that one of the two black lambs was dead, and she told him he was a bearer of bad tidings. He remembered what she had said when the black lamb of the previous season died, and he tried to win her round to a more cheerful view of things; but all to no good. It was a settled conviction with 'Ola that the house had entered on a period of bad luck; and, although she would

hardly talk of the subject, this idea was further strengthened by her father losing the action that Cawpkin brought against him, for the purpose of which, as was pretty well known now, Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling had lent Cawpkin money. For some time afterwards Abe worried about this—for which he secretly and largely held Tamar to be responsible, "because of the way in which she irritated peace and business out of his head"—not that the action was a very costly one, but that the mere fact of his losing it hurt him enormously and would, he said, upset his prestige on the market. For the big woman's share in the matter he had more contempt than surprise. As to the costs of the matter he recovered a considerable portion of them during the first week he was out of bed, or rather Lucian did for him by a lucky transaction in hay—an affair that did not alter 'Ola's despondent view of things generally. During the previous hay season Abe, who had given very close attention for some years to this part of his business, had bought up all that he could get hold of from the two Cawpkins and three other neighbours, his belief being that there would be a big shortage in the following spring. That idea had proved to be correct; and owing to Lucian's calling his attention to the matter, he cleared off all that he did not need for his own horses and cattle, a large surplus at from £6 10s. to £7 a ton. Had he held on for two or three weeks more he would have made another ten shillings a ton; but Abe never worked on a plan of that sort, his habit being to sell whilst the market was rising and buy when it was still going down—with, of course, an eye always to probabilities and a commonsense medium course.

In plain fact, his being laid up at a time when he particularly needed to be about and the loss of the Cawpkin lawsuit were the only two financial setbacks that he had experienced at the Hall Farm. Tamar's disquieting presence was purely a temperamental trouble, as it was

a private one till the rumour got about that "the silent woman was driving him mad." Truth to tell he had always been pretty fortunate in money affairs. Yet it seemed as if 'Ola's presentiment was well-founded after all. For her father had not been about as usual more than ten or twelve days when a piece of real ill-luck happened to him. As a matter of fact this came out of his trouble with the elder Cawpkin, and the intermediate link occurred between him and Madoc. He was driving back from Maldon when he overtook Madoc, who had a much slower horse than Abe's. The young man, having seen who was behind him and being in a peevish mood, kept the middle of the road, with a slight leaning to the wrong side; and, as the roadway was rather narrow there, Abe could not pass him. So at length Abe asked Madoc to pull aside. The latter turned half-around, in pretence to see who the speaker was, and flung out a jeering remark about recent happenings; at the same moment he unknowingly pulled his horse sufficiently aside for Abe to whip up level with him. This was what Abe did, stung with the taunt; and, as he flashed by, he gave Madoc a back-hander on the cheek that caused him another black-eye and nearly knocked him off his seat. Naturally the young man gave voice to many strong words—these being native to him at such a time—and mercilessly lashed his animal for that which he knew he could not attain and would have been afraid to if he could —overtake Abe; who had driven on, with no further thought of the matter than that he had chastised an insolent and ignorant youngster. When Abe arrived home it was to learn that his pied bull had tossed a villager's little girl, who had wandered into his pasture, doing her some serious harm; and, although not a shilling was legally due from him, he at once set about making all the reparation he could, and worried more about the affair than he had done over his broken leg and the lawsuit together.

V

It was the beginning of the week. Abe and Lucian had gone to London, mostly in connection with their improved patent farming appliances. They remained away two days, and, amongst other things talked of were such mutual and kindred matters as are already known to the reader—the Yorkshire episode alone excepted. On their return, 'Ola met them at Maldon, with Mrs. Moriety's trap. Seeing this, Abe asked the meaning of it.

"Get up," said she, gloomily, "and I will tell you as we go along."

Lucian, whose thoughts were usually quicker than Abe's gave her a rapid glance and had it returned by one behind which he fancied he could see tears. With all his heart he wanted to talk kindly to her. Her manner told him that something serious had happened, and his only desire was to get the information over and sympathise with her. He tried for an opportunity to assure her of this, but failed; Abe was there all the time.

The latter took the reins and said, "What is it?"

"Don't trouble,—let us get out of the town first.—There's no hurry."

At that Abe drove away, saying no more, but Lucian was undecided. So out of the little township and on to the high road they rattled along, to where the young greens of mid-spring were showing up in vivid contrast to each other; to where hedgerow, tree and welkin were full of the love songs of mating-time, and where almost every house and cottage had its patches or spreads of delicate orchard blossom. Back from two quiet days, in

which there had been other pleasures than respite, and out of the hurly-burly of teeming streets, Abe was drinking it all in and thinking how glorious it all would be were it not for that continual friction at the other end. On his part, Lucian, less impressionable than his older friend, yet in other ways as keenly alive to most forms of natural beauty, saw none of it. A link that cannot be explained, except as genuine affection and affinity, told him that what 'Ola had to say would blot out all this sweetness of English landscape. It was for this reason that he was glad when 'Ola, no longer able to keep her tidings in and seeing that the telling of them was growing to be more difficult, said,

"You're coming home to bad news, father, I'm sorry to say."

"Why, what's the matter?—Is Tamar sick, or what?"

"It's a lot worse than that, I'm afraid." And Lucian, who sat behind Abe, got a quick, sidelong optical touch with her.

"A lot worse? Then something serious has happened. What is it, 'Ola?" Abe asked, now rather sharply and quite alive to possibilities.

"Well, it is very serious, I fear; but don't take on about it too much, father," and she turned to look at him, those wondrous eyes of hers full of filial concern. "We shall get over the loss all right," she added, with an effort to be more cheerful.

"But what is it, girl?"

"There's been a big fire——"

"We're burnt out?" he queried eagerly, turning towards her and causing the horse to swerve almost into the hedge on the near side.

"No, not so bad as that. The house is hardly touched; but all the rest is gone," was the sorrowful answer.

"Good heavens! What, everything?"

"Yes, thereabouts. The barns, stacks, everything in

the barns and——" 'Ola's tears prevented her from further explanations.

"My God!" muttered Abe, as he turned a set face forward. "Don't cry, my lass.—We shall get over it, as you say. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner! There, there, don't cry,—We can build up again. It's only a loss of time and that." And while he murmured some lines of a psalm, Lucian managed to get his arm under the back of the seat, find 'Ola's hand and squeeze it gently to the accompaniment of some verbal sympathy, neither of which were returned by her. "When was it, did you say?" her father asked.

"Last night.—Some of it is still smouldering," said 'Ola, wiping her face. "And if the wind hadn't been blowing from the house it would all have gone. We did all we could, and nearly all the village came to help us; but the fire seemed to be everywhere at once, and we had only buckets and the pond, as you know."

"Yes, yes. There you are, Lu',—more inventions wanted—how to put out fires where there are no fire brigades, and that's the case with ninety per cent. of the farms in England. Dry your tears, girl. We'll build up again." Then, to relieve 'Ola's mind, he broke into,

> "'Cheer, boys, cheer, the way is on before us!
> Cheer, boys, cheer for a new and better land!
> Cheer, boys, che——'

"Oh, God in heaven!" As suddenly as he had changed from the old song to rent his horrified surprise in this exclamation, he pulled the horse up, and nearly threw them all out of the trap.

"Dad, dad, what's the matter!" cried 'Ola, staring at him, holding his driving arm and fearing what she dared not speak; while Lucian stood up on the back-board ready for any emergency, and adding,

"What's wrong, old man, say?"

"The insurance—I've forgotten to pay the insurance," came slowly from Abe in a voice that was hard and even.

Against this announcement both 'Ola and Lucian found themselves mute. How the painful pause would have been broken it is hard to say, had not a motor car come along, causing 'Ola to seize the reins and urge the horse aside out of the way, as she said, "Never mind, father,—cheer up.—We shall get over it."

The car whizzed past, leaving its cloud of dust; Lucian sat down again; and Abe mechanically took the reins once more, saying, "That woman!—it's all her fault. Curse her! What man could keep things in his head with her about him!"

"Don't say that, dad.—She has worked like a man all night." He was silent. Presently 'Ola added, "If anything could have been saved it would be owing to her, I'm sure."

Still he was mute, and hardly another word was said during the remainder of that seven miles' drive. As they went through the village many a one came forward, or called out as they drove by, to say how sorry he or she was at what had happened; and Abe received it all in a manner that showed to 'Ola and Lucian that he was harder hit than what the fire alone would cost him. Just as they were passing the King's Head, Cawpkin and Madoc came out and climbed into a dog-cart, but neither of them made any signs of their knowing the occupants of the trap. When they rode past the mill the detached masses of black embers could be seen flying off and about two sides of the house; and Abe recollected his thoughts, when he walked down that road with his burnt hands in his coat pockets, on the night when the Institute was opened. As he descended from the trap, Dunstan, Jonas, Ramsbottom and others came forward to express their regrets. But Jinglejoy stood aside, with his heart too full for ready utterance. Abe saw him, guessed

what was the matter with the old man and left the others there and then to go to him. Three minutes later Abe went indoors—after a rapid, wordless glance at the blackened "stack-garth," where had stood so many fine ricks when he went away; also at the ruins of barns, stables, piggeries, cowhouses, etc., on which he had spent money and much time to fit them for his need of cattle-rearing and cheese-making, and to bring the places generally up to his idea of what they should be.

Inside the house Abe met Tamar, who had seen him from a window; but it was not in her nature to meet him out there and say how sorry she was at what had happened. She deeply regretted such a loss; others should know that she did, and that was enough for her. Neat, precise and formal as ever, there was nothing in her appearance to show that she had "worked like a man" since her accidental discovery of the fire, about midnight. Remembering what 'Ola had said on this point, he thanked her for her efforts on his behalf. Her reply was that there seemed to be no means of finding out how the fire began, except that it appeared to be a case of incendiarism, as so many places were found to be burning at once. Abe had already heard this, and he went his way to the study where he spent the evening in writing and arranging papers. Immediately after breakfast on the following morning he appeared with a kit-bag and made the announcement that he was going to Chelmsford and might not be back that night. Both 'Ola and Lucian remembered afterwards that, while he said no more than a bare "Good morning" in a rather short manner to Tamar, his good-byes to them, separately, and his kiss to 'Ola, were of a warmer, deeper and more lingering nature than ordinarily. This, however, they put down to the new trouble, and thought no more about the matter, because he otherwise appeared to be quite his usual self. At the Hare and Hounds he borrowed Mrs. Moriety's

trap and got a youth to drive him to Maldon. When the young man returned in the afternoon he carried a note to 'Ola; it was from her father saying he would probably be away two or three days. One thing that surprised them all was that Abe had neither discussed the fire with any one, making no effort to discover its origin, nor had given a scrap of direction as to re-erecting the buildings. Then the third day came, bringing grief and a great surprise.

A Maldon solicitor drove over to see 'Ola. He was at the farm for quite an hour. When he left, 'Ola, except for the dull aching at her heart, hardly knew whether she was awake or dreaming. About the middle of his visit, when his tale had been once told, that is, she half-involuntarily, in sheer desire to have some other person present as a proof that her ears were not deceiving her, fetched Tamar in to hear the story told again. In brief it was this: Her father had made everything over to her unconditionally, and had apparently disappeared. All that the solicitor could say was that Mr. Shuttleworth had called on him with certain papers, documents, etc., had the deed of gift drawn up there and then, directed that 'Ola was to be made acquainted with the matter three days later and had gone his way. The only ray of comfort that the lawyer could impart to the dazed girl, and at the same time the chief item of secondary interest, was that he had learnt at the bank that her father had drawn out £100 in gold and notes immediately before calling at his office. Finally he said that whatever he could do for them he would, if they would instruct him. So, at Tamar's suggestion, he departed to ask the police to try to find Abe's whereabouts.

For days afterwards 'Ola went about like one in a dream. She had cried at her father's loss by the fire. Now her grief was too deep for tears. At the instigation of Tamar she wrote short letters to her few relatives in

Yorkshire, saying that her father, after being occasionally strange in manner for some time, had left home, no one knew where to, and would they let her know if they heard anything of him. To those around her she never mentioned the subject; and Tamar, in addition to knowing the girl thoroughly and respecting her grief, was not one to discuss such a subject. To Lucian this heavy silence was an added sorrow. He would a thousand times rather that she had talked the matter the day through. Several times he tried to engage her in conversation on it, but always to no good purpose. With his optimism crushed out of him by her silent pain and the continual downcast look of her wondrous eyes, he was oppressed with the desire to endeavour to ease her burden, if only by assuring her of his love and his sympathy under the circumstances; but he could not break past that barrier of mute resignation and reserve. She clung to, leaned to no one, looked to no one for comfort, help or advice. To her it appeared to be matterless what came or went. That she was one who could feel deeply, Lucian had always believed; but the depth to which this affair had stirred her heart had both surprised him and made him love her more than ever. At the same time, on his own side, he was also bearing silently the keenest pain of its kind that he had known for many years. Coming as it did on the top of the apparent waning of what he had thought to be 'Ola's affection for him, this loss and strange disappearance of one who had grown to be an absolute friend to him was a grief indeed. With Tamar he had never talked much; there was no kind of tie between them. Hence he had no one with whom to discuss the matter, except when he now and then went to Maldon, on which occasions he called on the solicitor and on the head of the local police to learn if anything had been heard of Abe. His returns from these journeys always brought with them a pleasure that was a pain; for on each homecoming

'Ola met him, freely, quickly, to ask if there was news of her father; only to go away again at once, cast down afresh, when she heard his pained answer to the contrary. As to Tamar, what she felt and thought were according to her opinion, her affairs only. That she grieved and wondered were facts known to herself, without a care whether others knew or not; but his wondering was entirely: Had Abe gone away consciously on a set plan, as the £100 seemed to indicate, or had he left them with his mind unhinged and come to some sudden end? It never occurred to her to think that she was the main cause of his going. Lucian and 'Ola—the latter in less clear manner and not with the same hard judgment—wondered on the same two points that stirred Tamar; but to the generally known things that might have led to Abe's derangement (if such it really was), they added that cause which she missed. Of his absence directly not one of the three said a word to any one else, nor did they allow it to leak out that everything had been made over to 'Ola. Without his having a mind that was either deep or superficially sensitive enough to be hurt by the fact, it was on this point that Ramsbottom found himself suspiciously left out in the cold. He saw, of course, that "something was up at the Hall Farm," that Abe was curiously missing, etc., and that whenever he touched the subject he got only evasive answers—all because the trio had agreed (although Tamar had not seen why Ben should not be told) to keep the whole matter to themselves as long as possible, or till such time as the truth was known about Abe. Yet, such was ever the difficulty of keeping a secret of that kind in rural surroundings, a rumour of the truth was common in the village. Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling, eager to carry the first authentic bad news to the Rectory—where Mrs. Chapman was confined to the house now and then with some growing disease—naturally did her best to learn why and where Abe had

gone; but, as it was now known that she had lent money to Cawpkin for the lawsuit, she could not go gleaning at the Hall Farm. Pinch Jellie was in the same circumscribed conditions. Mrs. Briggs, Miss Scopes (whose cough had become so bad that she was often told it would "carry her off"), Jones, Varley, Jinglejoy and a few others whose standing at the farm might have warranted their referring to the subject quietly, were all kind enough, or learnt wisdom by the much they saw there and the little they heard, to guess more and say nothing.

Thus the weeks went by and no trace was found of Abe. Nor was anything discovered concerning the origin of the fire. All that could be said definitely was that Tamar was awakened by a smell of burning and the noises of frightened animals, just after midnight, and saw, from her chamber-window, that the barns, etc., were already alight in three distinctive places. It was owing to her promptness in arousing the household, and rushing out in a dressing-gown regardless of her danger in a stampede of wild hoofs, that most of the horses and cattle were saved. It appeared that the constable had seen the fire while on his way from the marshes to the village, and had hurried along and procured what help he could. The county police authorities sent down a detective, who spent some weeks in making inquiries in all likely directions; but he could gather no evidence that would justify him in preferring a charge against anyone. There the matter seemed likely to remain, when suddenly the detective, acting on Tamar's tardily communicated suspicions, set the place in a ferment by arresting Madoc, who was very loud in his declarations of innocence.

Before this time had arrived, however, Tamar's undemonstrative practicability had come to the front again. Ere a week had gone by after the solicitor called, she put it to 'Ola, quietly, with no loss of words, yet, in all intentional kindness, that the latter must either sell out,

or begin at once to rebuild and make the farm workable. She also pointed out that in the former case 'Ola would not have more than enough money to keep her in some comfort for longer than eight or ten years at the outside; while the other course would provide them with a continual living, because, with the aid of a good man as overseer, they could work the farm themselves. She would have liked to hint at Ben and Lucian; but policy said no to the latter direction and kindness together with knowledge of 'Ola said no to both. To these alternative propositions 'Ola listened in indifference, said little and agreed to Tamar's advice to follow the latter course. Then Tamar set to work, in a way that surprised no one; unless it were Lucian and Ben, who were not quite prepared for the sacrifice that she made. In all this she regularly consulted 'Ola's wishes; but, owing to the girl's pathetic condition and to the fact that it was Tamar who did the consulting, all that she advised was carried out—with the sole exceptions of a few points where either Lucian's first-hand knowledge or his clearer insight prevailed without argument. The first two things that Tamar did were to ascertain what there was in the bank and what would be the cost of the rebuilding. One did not agree with the other. All that lay to 'Ola's account would be wanted for working capital and to face the possibility of two consecutive bad seasons. So, without a word to the girl, she sold half of her annuity, added the proceeds to her savings and began to lay out the total in rebuilding and replacing stock. But it would not go far enough, unless the farm and its work should be reduced. Rather than do this, Tamar advised the selling of the mill. 'Ola cared but little either way; and when Jonas heard that "his" mill was to be offered for sale, he succeeded in making up a small "family" company of himself, Mrs. Moriety and Kester Nobbs (who had just "put the banns in" concerning Amariah and himself,

irrespective of her child, which was then a month old), and buying the mill and the cottage, together with the two acres in which these stood. Pinch Jellie, however, who had Kester's foolish tongue to thank for hearing that the sale was to be effected, went to Lucian at his lodgings one evening and offered a higher price than theirs. But Tamar said no, such was her placid antipathy to the little dandy who had been the cause of so much trouble; and 'Ola, as a matter of course, also said no.

It was by these means that the damages were all repaired. And throughout the whole of it Lucian was Tamar's right-hand man. In everything that was done, he said something that was worth hearing; and Tamar was one of the last women on earth not to see the value of such insight and commonsense. Yet it was all curiously apart from 'Ola and she from it. Not that she was still, towards the end of these affairs, overwhelmed with grief; it was rather that her sorrow, while being in a way less heavy, had become more settled—more permanent because her father's whereabouts, or what had happened to him, was still a mystery and likely to remain one. That strain of superstition in her nature had taken deeper hold than she ever thought it would. The death of the two black lambs, followed by various troubles which culminated in her father's disappearance, had seemed to make her think that, do what they would to the contrary, there was general ruin yet to come. It was largely due to the state of 'Ola's mind that Ben found little favour with her at this time. In the spring he had entered on a period of farming pupilage at Down Hall (this being, apparently, a friendly arrangement made to please him); so that, while Lucian was helping Tamar in the rebuilding and was superintending the tilling and grazing generally, Ben's rather weak but otherwise good-looking face was pretty regularly seeking encouragement from 'Ola. Then, when she occasionally showed him that he was

becoming something of a nuisance, he would take his less than half-heeded counsel to Tamar—at which times Lucian would often turn away to some adjacent interest, in part amused and in part rather contemptuous of his seemingly successful rival. It was at this period that, as Tamar thought and with some misgiving, 'Ola should have seen the difference between the two young men—one so weak in certain ways and decidedly shallow in others, at times lightly forgetful of 'Ola's pressing sorrow, conceited where he should not be and intermittently offering Tamar counsel "as though" in Lucian's unspoken words, "it was some cast-off rags that had never been his;" and the other doing a man's work in a man's way, with now and then a gentle effort to win a more cheerful expression to 'Ola's face, yet never obtrusive. As a matter of fact 'Ola did now and then think of these differences in her two suitors, but only in a passing touch-and-go sort of manner. In the same way she saw that Lucian was the better man; yet goodness does not draw love as it is drawn by personality and that deeper, more subtle something which we term human magnetism. The early associations of the first sexually impressionable years of life are often weeds that have tremendously long roots; and if all young women practised natural selection to the extent of picking the best amongst men there would be far fewer unhappy marriages, scarcely any need of divorce courts and a sparsely populated world in which bachelors would outnumber all other persons. So it was that 'Ola, with no really settled mind on the subject, leaned somewhat to the worse whilst she saw and allowed the better to go by.

During these affairs there were four who stuck faithfully to the Hall Farm trio; these were Mrs. Briggs, old Varley, Dunstan and Mercy. But although both the postmistress and the blue-smacked philosopher were not slow to speak up in Tamar's favour whenever her name was traduced in the village, they were alone in their good

thoughts of her. For, with the exception of the very small minority of more enlightened persons in the neighbourhood, the idea had become general that "the silent woman" was a witch who had brought nothing but bad luck to everything she had touched in the locality. And in the minds of the ignorant this thought was further emphasised at the magisterial examination of Madoc. When this came about it was shown that, just as darkness set in on the night when the barns and ricks were burnt, Tamar, while going to the village for some urgent article —in the absence of Mercy—saw someone, whom she took to be Madoc, climb over a gate into a field that bordered the farmstead; and that on her way back she met Madoc not far from the same place, he being rather the worse for liquor and carrying a big empty can. It was on these suspicious points, remembered by Tamar when the rebuilding, etc., were fairly under way, that the detective had proceeded and found sufficient evidence to bring the matter home to Madoc; who finally pleaded guilty and pitifully enlarged on his half-drunken state in extenuation of his guilt. The result was his committal for trial at the summer assize. Madoc was no favourite anywhere in the place. A hard and dissatisfied master, with no attractive qualities for persons of his own social level, he was yet a native; Tamar was an alien, a complete outsider to the secretive, suspicious and narrowly conservative East Anglian. To these she was responsible for so much dissension and trouble in the parish; and when Madoc had been sent to Chelmsford gaol—about which time "the Squire" was enclosing some common land, and the Rector, during Mrs. Chapman's absence with some internal and insidious malady, was turning the Institute into little more than a Band of Hope meeting place —a party of the villagers set off one evening to duck Tamar "seven times in the horse pond as a witch." If it had not been for Jonas hearing of the affair, they would

certainly have carried out their intentions—as had been done some weeks previously in another part of the county. But, through the agency of the miller, he, Lucian, Dunstan and a couple of farm hands met the party at the gate and talked such law and reason into them that they went away, peaceful though unsatisfied.

VI

So came the time when the rebuilding and restocking were completed. Once more the farmstead in which Abe had taken so much pride, for which he had worked with all the ardour of his strenuous nature, stood up fair and seemingly prosperous for all to see. But it was not so extensive as it had been. Owing to Tamar's advice the horse and cattle-breeding were discarded, except such as were parts of ordinary farming. As to the cheese making: Although what they could produce of the "Essex deeps" were finding a way into the market, that was a business, said she, requiring far more capital than they could command. They had the secret of this cheese; and she thought that their best plan was to continue to turn it out in such small quantities as they could comfortably manage till the demand grew larger—if ever that day should come. Hence this portion of the work had also been reduced, and Tamar's bad name in the village had grown in consequence of three more persons being thrown out of work. Then she turned her attention to the land, of which she considered they had too much for them to work properly, unless they engaged a competent man as manager—whose efficiency they would have to risk, and who might not do well enough with things generally to pay for his extra cost. Thus it came about that a large portion of the arable and grass lands were, through the agency of Ben, offered on lease to the people of Down Hall; who were glad of the opportunity.

By this time midsummer was again drawing near, and Lucian was asking himself the disturbing question as to

whether or not he should remain longer on the scene. 'Ola's attitude toward him had not changed a whit since the disappearance of her father; nor, try as he would in quiet ways, could he get nearer to her. A sort of settled melancholy had fastened its blight on her, and there was, apparently, no breaking it down. So far as he could see, Tamar held the balance of her influence evenly between him and Ramsbottom; not that this was much either way. For, as Tamar had long known and Lucian had now learnt to know, 'Ola was not one to regard any person's opinion but her own in an affair of this sort. In the matter of his going or staying there was, however, one new factor with which he had now to reckon: These changes in the farm and its general working had made him, in a way, needless, and had therefore rendered his position doubly untenable. Not that Tamar—who, in Jinglejoy's parlance, had "siddled" into the general management of things, just as she had "siddled" into the domestic arrangements a year and nine months previously—not that she had given Lucian any hints as to his services being no longer required. But he would have been strangely lacking in commonsense not to have seen that in the new disposition of matters there was no place left for him. Owing to that reason, he had told himself so several times of late, his self-respect saying to him—"You must just be getting a move on yourself, Lu'." And having spent the whole evening in finally and carefully weighing the whole matter up, in every way that he could see it, he went to bed with a heavy heart and the decision to bring things to a climax on the following day, if he could find an opportunity to that end.

It might have been that fate was playing into his hands on the morrow; he thought it was and, as he afterwards cogitated, not a kind fate, either, to all appearances. Soon after dinner, before he had left the premises again, he came upon 'Ola in the cheese-room; and knowing that

they would be safe there from intrusion, for a while at least, he resolved to know at once whether it would be worth his while to stay longer or to have done with it all and say farewell.

"I wonder if you would have come in here like this if you had known I wanted to speak to you?" he remarked in an opening way.

She lifted her head, from the task of checking the "deeps" and the "ordinaries" with the cheese book, and fixed on his face a questioning look, her distinctive eyes being now sad and quiet to what they were wont to be. "I don't know," she said tentatively.

Somehow this seemed to crooken what he had looked forward to as the ploughing of a fairly straight furrow. For a few moments he was silent. Then he began again with, "Well, I just did wish to see you, badly. The fact is, 'Ola," and he tried to shake some of that unreasonable gloom out of his voice, "I want to speak to you privately, just a little; and I guess you won't deny me that favour." She was still gazing steadily but not unkindly at him. "It's a delicate matter," he resumed, drawing as close to her as he could, while still keeping some observation on the approach to the door, which propriety forbade him to shut. "And——" Again he looked at her face; and, whether it was owing to a resolute endeavour to drag himself out of the depth into which he was floundering, or to something in the generally changed expression of her countenance, now more delicately beautiful than it had never been before to his knowledge, he blurted out, "The truth is, 'Ola, I want to ask you if there's any hope for me—to stay on longer here."

From the level, inquiring gaze, sad with the gentle grief of habit rather than with a violent sorrow, 'Ola drooped her head over the book in her hand. Instead of seeing her face (the by-gone glow, change and great expressiveness of which he had so tried to enshrine in

Petrarchian sonnets, not a tenth of which she had seen, and now passingly realised that he had tried in vain) he found himself looking straight at the top of her head, at the neat parting in that mass of rather rebellious hair, which was slightly darker than her father's yet had a coppery sheen of its own in certain lights,—a parting that, like her appointments generally, had not always been so neat. For one of the characteristics of 'Ola's grief at the utterly unexpected loss of her father was a change from being rather more careless than careful into the exercising of a neatness that had not previously been hers.

"'Ola!" Coming on the stillness of that tense atmosphere, with his own feelings so much under restraint as to give an unnatural tone to the word, his voice seemed to be strange and out of place—it appeared so to him, but not to her, who was outside of it and was a woman. "'Ola," he repeated; then became more natural, yet not less touched with sensibility, as he added, "You understand me.—Don't you?" She bowed her head a little lower, and he understood its meaning. "I've waited here a long time now, and it seems to me, some, that——" He was not complaining, only saying that he had waited over two months for this opportunity; but it did not occur to him to make his meaning plainer. "Well, there was a place for me here before and that place was a public excuse, you see, for staying; now my place has gone, and the excuse has gone with it, I guess." Still 'Ola said nothing; but she was slowly looking up at him, with a sort of pleading and self-condemnation in her eyes. "I take it," he resumed, after a short pause in which he had hoped that she would speak, "that you don't want me to say just how I love you—seems to me that a declaration of that sort would be just about enough belated to make you smile at any other time. You know it, 'Ola, just as well as I do—you know that whilst I've been learning to

be a farmer, some, I've been learning to love you all along, and more and more every week and every month. And now—well, you see, it seems to me the time has come to say it all out and make a fresh start one way or other from this point. . . . You know me well enough—I've no cards to play in that way,—only myself, my hands, health, a few brains maybe and a few pounds. . . . Will it be any use if I stay on, 'Ola?" In those last words there was more appealing, more tenderness than she had ever before heard in his voice. Lucian was touched to his deepest point.

"Oh, I——!" she exclaimed, as her bosom hove up to release a big sigh of pain; and was about to add "wish you could stay on," when she suddenly altered it to, "I know I've been to blame! I ought not to have—done as I have done! But——"

He broke the painful silence with, in a tone that was so despondent it went to her heart, "Then there's no hope for me, 'Ola?"

"No," she murmured in a self-condemnatory manner, her eyes saying far more than she knew how to let her tongue utter at the moment.

"Then I guess that puts the full stop to things," said he, choking down his feelings. "I shouldn't have asked you now; but, you see, something had to be said and done. I waited——." His unfinished remark was that he had waited till his services were no longer required; but, as it would have seemed to suggest a certain generosity, he left it unsaid, and concluded with, "Now I must be getting a move on me; or the folks round here will have something new to talk about."

He had half-turned away, when she pulled him up by saying tremulously, "I can't tell you how sorry I am—Hear me, please!" He was about again, looking at her pained face, as the words ran fast from her tongue and tears filled her eyes. "I ought to have known better

long since!—I admired you so much.—I—I liked you, and I thought I loved you. But——" A sob choked her utterance.

"Never mind," replied he, with a show of cheerfulness, hiding a heart that felt there was no more joy for it in life, "Never mind; it was a happy time till——" He almost said "till your father went away." "Well, we enjoyed it all for a year and a half, anyhow; and if there's no other satisfaction to be got out of it, there's that, I guess. Don't let it worry you, 'Ola. It's a blow—. Believe me, I shall never regret it. It's been just the finest time I've had on earth; and I'm not going back on it now because— Well, we can't all have the plums, when there are not enough to go round. Can we?"

She was putting her handkerchief back into the pocket of that big apron, looking at him with wiped eyes, thinking what a fine fellow he was to take it as he was doing, because she knew that he loved her as no other man had loved her within her knowledge; and she was half-inclined to say, "Go away a while and let me see what your absence does." But she remembered the past, saw the injustice of it all, and was afraid lest she should err again. There was the sound of footsteps without.

"Say good-bye." As Mercy crossed the doorway and disappeared, he moved sharply around the end of the long table, his hand out and his face wearing an optimism that was not in his heart. She put her hand into his, nor made any effort to withdraw it; although, after the first warm grip, he relaxed his hold and let her hand lay there.

They were looking straight into each other's eyes. It was the expression of a farewell that was heart-breaking to utter on one side and deeply painful on the other. Both hearts were full of many things to say; but neither of them spoke a word. Suddenly he bent his head, kissed

the back of her hand, then swung around on his heel and walked across to the kitchen door, his fine tall figure as upright as the door posts. At that instant she could almost have called him back, and would not have objected if he had kissed her instead of her hand. He was hardly out of sight, when the book was on the table and her face was buried in the handkerchief—only to reflect at the end of it all that, perhaps, it was best to let him go.

Lucian went straight on till he found Tamar, fortunately alone. To her he bade a short, formal good-bye —there was no need to offer explanations that would delay his going, beyond saying that " as they could do without him now he had decided to be moving;" she knew enough to guess the remainder, he thought—then out of the house he went, by a way that would not endanger his meeting 'Ola again. Outside there was no one to whom he needed to say a word of his departure. Had Dunstan been in sight, he would have spoken to him. Ordinarily he could not have left the place without saying good-bye to everyone, but not now. So out of the farmyard he swung and up the road, with a remark on the weather to Jonas, who stood in the mill gateway with his dexter eye looking towards the village, as Lucian went by.

But the latter did not keep to the road. He was in a hurry; so struck across the fields—to pull up suddenly when he jumped the stile where he and 'Ola had stood during their first conversation together. His mind had been so full of the idea of getting right away from the place, that he had forgotten this spot. Now he paused, remembering the corn that she " shelled " for him, some of which was still in his pocket-wallet at Mrs. Briggs's. For some minutes he leaned on the stile, looking back at the roof and chimneys of the house and calling the details of that other scene to mind; the reaping of the wheat from the big field behind him, which would presently have to be reaped of its barley; the time when he had

that "dust up" with the young shorthorn bull in the meadow there, when 'Ola had looked so frightened on hearing of the affair; and when he went down the road yonder on the way to his first ploughing lesson. He could still see 'Ola as she stood and spoke by the holly hedge that morning, in her print frock and big apron, seeming to be a sort of Hebe disguised as a farmer's daughter. He heaved a sigh at it all; and looked at his hands, incidentally, seeing that they were much harder than they had been two years before then. He felt stronger, healthier, bigger than he was then. Certainly his heart was bigger, much bigger; so that he had, he thought, gained in two ways by the experience. In fact, it appeared to him that the world had grown larger since then; his horizon had widened considerably.

"Yes," he said to himself, "it's done me a power of good. . . . Well, I guess I'll move back now, some. I've paid my fee, and I've had my lesson—played the Britisher for a spell according to taste, order and pattern. And now I'll just get back from this heavy soil, to something a bit lighter and brighter and—but, no, by gosh not happier! No"—and he began to sing softly,

"I'm setting on the stile, Mary,
  Where we set side by side;
On a bright May morning long ago,
  When first you were my bride.
The corn was springing fresh and green,
  The lark sang loud and high;
The red was on your lip, Mary,
  And the love-light in your eye. . . .

. . . . .

"The poor make no new friends;
But, oh, they love the better still
  The few our Father sends.
And you were all I had, Mary,
  My blessing and my pride;
There's nothing left to care for now,
  Since——"

It was no use; there was too much in his throat to allow him to sing more of the old song. He steadied himself inwardly, stood up from the stile, took a last look at the top of the house, and turned away muttering, "And now for the slow, slow ache of the heart that cannot return."

An hour later he had said good-bye to Mrs. Briggs, more fully than he had to Tamar; because he trusted her more, knew and liked her better; had packed his baggage, to be forwarded by Kester Nobbs's cart; and was away, footing it to Maldon, feeling that he must keep swinging at something, his heart like lead and Mrs. Briggs's motherly regrets in his mind. No longer "an optimist by persuasion;" he blamed himself—as most of us do when the act is beyond recall—for attacking the matter as he had done in the cheese-room. Yet, he asked himself, would he have been more successful in a more suitable situation, or if he had played the part of a pleader more? Apparently he would not; but he could not be wholly sure, and therein lay the point that worried him. Then, with a start, he recollected the thunderstorm that had abruptly ended their first memorable meeting at the stile; and he began to ask himself if, after all, 'Ola was right in "that black lamb business?" Was there, could there be some subtle connection between human doings and the happenings of nature? Was this apparently crude lore of the countryside—the many things that he had heard from Jinglejoy, old Simmons and the like, and more second-handedly from 'Ola and two or three more, all more or less forms of superstition—was it the corrupted remnant of a deeper learning that had been common to mankind before he took to the acquiring of so many misleading and confounding 'isms? Or was it mere coincidence? Had she not often playfully—he now thought that it had been with a certain substratum of belief on most occasions—reminded him that na-

ture had intervened to separate them at their first real meeting? It was curious. He began to call up other coincidences of a similar kind. By the time he covered three miles he was half-inclined to go back, or to return after a while, and watch events. If "that black lamb business" should work out according to her prophesy, she might yet be in greater need of a friend that she had been. But how could that be? She was safe financially. And there was—and so on, and so on, back to the starting point; that of no hope for him, the presence of Ramsbottom, etc., till again his heart was like lead and he tramped along heedless of all the maturing scenic beauties of the season, heedless of those sweet-toned English birds which he had learnt to love so well, heedless of the afternoon's heat as he was of the vagueness of his future.

If he had gone back to watch how matters turned out, or had placed himself at some point where he could hear safe tidings, Lucian would have found eventually that Ben played ducks and drakes with the favour he enjoyed at 'Ola's hands. Before that happened, however, the village had the excitement of knowing that Madoc had been sent to hard labour for two years, and of witnessing a double wedding. Jonas had finally been accepted by Mrs. Moriety, who had received his strong and unceasing attentions with that matronly weakness which was her main point of character, for which reason she had promised not to air her patchwork quilts any more on certain anniversaries. And as Amariah—who, it had been said, "would make a shiftless bride for some fool some day"—and Kester had really decided to "go to church," it was arranged that the two affairs should take place on one day; after which Kester, who had gone into lodgings because he and his widowed mother could not agree about his proposed marriage, and Amariah were to occupy the mill cottage; while Jonas attended to the mill in the daytime and spent his evenings behind the little bar and in

the "snug" of the Hare and Hounds. Thus it came about that the Rector's *locum tenens*—he being away on holiday—married the two pairs on one day, which some of the neighbours said was due to Jonas's care in the matter of expense. But, all the same, there was no cutting down in that peculiarly East Anglian compliment at rural weddings, known as "rough bands." When otherwise all would have been as quiet without as it was within the two houses, a dozen or so of young men, headed by Simmons and his familiars and provided with frying pans, tin sauce-pans and other "instruments" of that sort, gathered about the Hare and Hounds and serenaded Jonas and his bride with some of the most discordant "music" that was ever heard apart from a Hindu funeral. Then Kester and Amariah had their share; but it was a much larger one than what had been given to the elder bride and bridegroom, in addition to which they were treated to certain songs and remarks that smacked as much of the flesh and the devil as they did of that heavy Essex soil.

It was only a few weeks after this that the whole place, especially the higher social part of it, was set agog by a rumour affecting Tamar. In fact, it was the sudden flaring up of a long smouldering; so sudden and so virulent in its nature that Mrs. Briggs, after a short consultation with Miss Scopes—who was confined indoors by a chill—marched straight off to the Hall Farm, on the evening of the very day when she first heard the story definitely from Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling; who had brought it direct from Down Hall, where she had been to tea, and hardly knew how to contain herself on the subject. It happened that Tamar had driven over to Maldon that afternoon, with butter, eggs and a couple of "deeps," and had not returned. Mrs. Briggs was therefore compelled to ease her mind to 'Ola, which had been half her intention as she hurried her business-like stride down the

road. Truth to tell, she had not seen how she could, even with all her practical direct application, approach Tamar with the matter. She found 'Ola in her father's study; where, after rummaging amongst old papers in the hope of finding some letter from him to her or something that would bear directly on his strange disappearance, 'Ola was reading some verses which had reached her on the previous day in the form of an unconventional letter from Lucian. And when the tale was told, the nature of which gave honest Mrs. Briggs considerable trouble in the recital, it amounted to the rumour that Tamar had helped to kill Abe's first wife, then married him and had served seven years for killing two of her own children. In a moment 'Ola, who paid no heed to the mixture of fact and fiction, saw from where the rumour must have started. She, in a different way, was a great deal more hurt than Mrs. Briggs was; and was now as much on the alert to consequences. The practical postmistress simply wanted to go back and say to all and sundry that the whole story was a pack of lies. Without being able to empower her to do this, 'Ola denied what she could of the tale, and was immediately startled again by Mrs. Briggs saying,

"Depend upon it, my dear, whoever set such a lie afloat is responsible for the other rumours that have been going about."

"What other rumours?" 'Ola asked, as the poem in her hand caught her wandering gaze and gave her a new pain.

"Why, about Miss Pringle."

"What about her? I haven't heard any."

"Oh, no, of course not—you all live so much away from us nowadays, you see. Besides, I don't suppose such things would come to your ears in any case, only by chance," was the excusing reply. "And, poor, dear girl, you have had so much trouble all this year one way

or another that I feel ashamed to bring you this now. But what could I do?—You ought to know—it's so serious! It's real defamation!—Isn't it? I call it downright awful for such things to be said! I was never so astonished and disgusted in my life—never!"

"I quite believe you," was 'Ola's comment, forced out by the unusually animated face of her old, blunt friend. "But what are the rumours?" Racked with the pain of disillusionment, fired with growing anger at the deceit and now stirred with new interest to know what else had been said, 'Ola found it difficult to keep the bit from between the teeth of her feelings.

"Well, they are nothing near so definite; they're just nasty, sly remarks that are not worth noticing by themselves, but might do a lot of harm with some people. I've heard them for months past, but only amongst the villagers, about Miss Pringle not being as good as she ought to be—as if any of us were!—and about her having lived a very different life somewhere else, a sort of skeleton in the cupboard, you know. Where they've got it all from, I can't think, but——"

"I think I know," said 'Ola, in quiet significance.

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not going to ask where; but I know it ought to be stopped—such shameful lying!—as if they must jump on one that's down! You know, they did say that she broke your father's leg, then set fire to the place and drove him away. And I don't know what they haven't said, one way or another!"

"Well, *you* know that it's practically all untrue."

"Yes; but it's so awful to have one's friends living in the middle of such!"

"Never mind, we shall get over it," said 'Ola, involuntarily sighing and half-preoccupied. Then she glanced up from the writing in her hand, adding, with renewed

interest, "Is that the way they speak of us up at the Rectory?" 'Ola meant at the weekly sewing and other meetings.

"Oh, no—well, some of them would, of course, and I daresay do amongst themselves but, you see, they don't let some of us hear them, except just now and then a remark or two. But it soon drops. And to do her justice, although she has her failings and is often downright ill to look at, I'm sure Mrs. Chapman would soon be down on anything of that if she knew of it; but as for her sister-in-law—well, perhaps the least said——"

A shadow fell across the window, causing 'Ola to look that way and see Ben on his way to the front door. At this, Mrs. Briggs arose; 'Ola did likewise, involuntarily placing Lucian's verses on the table. Mrs. Briggs said how hot the weather was, and that she must be hurrying back to make up the evening mail. On the way to the outer door she asked to be forgiven for "the awful news" she had brought, etc., 'Ola said she was glad to know of the rumour and the elder woman saw that the remark was meant. So they arrived at the door, which was always open during daylight at that time of the year; just as Ben sauntered up to it and said, "How do you do?" to Mrs. Briggs, then turned to 'Ola and asked "Can I come in?"

"Yes," she replied, without taking her eyes from her companion, and digging her nails into the palms of her hands behind her back. "Tamar is not back yet; but you can come in.—I want to see you." And with the last five words, said unintentionally in a tone that made him prick up his ears, she shot at him a momentary glance that he caught and at which he instantly began to wonder. Then, whilst they finished their few parting words on the big stone slab outside the threshold, he walked leisurely in and hung up his bouler hat and cane on the buckhorn pegs in the hall, and began to whistle a light,

popular melody while he waited and looked at old, coloured prints of horses and hunting sketches on which he had gazed scores of times but had never studied. In the meantime, unknown to him, Mrs. Briggs was throwing an occasional sidelong glance at him and thinking what a pity it was that no better than he—all on the top, she was sure—should oust such a fine young man as the Yankee (all Americans were Yankees to Mrs. Briggs); but, then, young women never did know where their own interests lay most, and she supposed they never would know. With that thought at the back of her mind Mrs. Briggs took her way up to the village, wondering if the sultriness would end in a thunderstorm; but thinking more of the rumours, of what 'Ola had said about them, and of that sudden and rather hard change in the girl's manner from the moment when she said "I think I know."

As 'Ola turned indoors again, Ben met her with the light remark, "I thought you would like me to run over for half an hour; but I must get back soon—There's a card party on at the Hall to-night."

"Yes, I do want to see you," she answered, again in that decided tone; and led the way into the parlour, feeling that suggestion in his opening words and remembering that it was somewhat of a piece with certain other remarks, etc., of his during the past few months, chiefly since the disappearance of her father. "Shut the door," said she, as he walked inside.

"Don't you think it's hot enough?" he asked, looking at her indolently.

"Yes; but I want the door shut, all the same, and I'm afraid you will." She went over and stood near the tall, open French windows, where she could see who came within earshot.

He gave her a further stare, thought there was something curious about her, did as he was bidden, then

turned towards her again, saying, with an attempt at a smile that was only foolish, "You're a bit funny to-night, 'Ola—aren't you? What's the matter?"

For reply she asked, with no more accusation in voice or manner than a certain quiet hardness, "What possessed you to talk about Tamar and those Yorkshire matters?"

"I—er—I didn't say—" he stammered, with all the appearance of guilt, then blurted out, "But hang it, 'Ola, look here, what's the matter with you to-night?"

"But what made you talk about them?" was the persistent query, the while she took in the details of his faultless "get-up" and half-realised how weak his good-looking face was, generally, in contrast to Lucian's.

"But I—I didn't say anything to hurt!"

"You have said enough to fill the whole place."

"But I tell you, I said next to nothing!"

"What *did* you say?" Cornered, he was silent; and his pale eyes, of an uncertain brown, shifted from her searching gaze to other things, then back, and flitted away again. Standing there, looking at him as she was, with one hand on the long white curtains on a level with her shoulder, the other hanging down, she seeming to have suddenly grown taller and fuller—fairly tall and full though she always was—it was easy to see why strangers always took her to be three to four years above her age. "Can't you tell me what you said?" came the determined query, in which there now appeared to be a touch of ironic pity that was probably accidental. . . . "Was this why you have been so rude to her and about her at times?"

"I tell you I said nothing to hurt!"

"Don't speak so loud. Then you don't know what you did say?"

"Yes, I do; but I tell you——"

"Then tell me *what* you said."

Again he tried to look straight at her, failed, and turned towards the fireplace, saying, "It strikes me you're trying to make something out of nothing, just because of something I don't know anything about."

In a sense her gaze was merciless as it followed the movements of his set-up, excellently tailored figure, from the brown boots and riding gaiters to the well-brushed hair. She saw it all, as she had noted that incidental petulance in his tone; but she saw much more. For 'Ola had suddenly come upon knowledge, on the edge of which she had stumbled vaguely several times of late, but never with sufficient insight to grasp it as she did now—knowlledge that at once made her shrink, stiffen, and sent her father's anger flaming up to eyes and cheeks. But she kept her hold on that. Had he owned up to the charge in a manly way, shown that it was due to a weak moment when, perhaps, he had drunk a glass of wine too much, and said that he was sorry—had he done this, the chances were that she would have forgiven him, reprehensible though she would still have thought the action. At least such a confession on his part would have prevented her from seeing him as she now saw him, in a light that made him squirm when it broke in on his understanding.

"Was it nothing to tell the people about here of those unhappy times and things? . . . Didn't you think we were unhappy enough as it was?"

"I didn't see it like that," was the half-evasive answer, given with his face partially turned away from her.

"Was it nothing to say that Tamar helped father to kill mother?"

"So she did in a way," with which he faced around to justify himself.

"Then you did say it?"

"Not in that way!" he answered, seeing the flashing of her eyes that accompanied the question.

For a moment 'Ola was silent, weighing him by his

words and bearing to the last scruple, till he could no longer face her gaze. Then she asked, "Was it nothing to say that Tamar killed two of her children?"——

"I didn't say two!" he interrupted.

"Then you said one." He made no answer. "And you said she had been in prison for it. . . . Was all this nothing?—here, where we have to live as best we can."

"I didn't mean *you* any harm! It was silly, I know, but——"

"Wasn't it harm to me to talk like that about the woman that has to live with me?—Wasn't it harm to me to say anything of the sort in this place?" She was almost afraid to continue, lest her anger should break her control. Yet that anger was compelling her to tell out each word as though it were a figure in a momentous total.

"Look here, 'Ola, I'm very sorry, of course; but, after all, what's she doing here?"

"Do you want to see me alone, then, after all the trouble that's been?"

"No; but——" He pulled up, his face filled with an expression that seemed to say he had not previously seen the matter in this light.

"And did you think it was nothing to cast reflections on her as you have done for months past?"

"Well, hang it all, I've said I'm sorry,—haven't I? I just happened to mention these things definitely last night——"

"After hinting at them for months——"

"To young Powers (the son at Down Hall), and never thought anything more about it; and here——"

"Ben, you are a cad!—a mean, contemptible cad!" It was out at last, and all her delicate beauty was gone before that rush of passionate shame which made him fall back. "For months you throw suspicion on a defenseless woman, never thinking of me, never thinking of the position we're in! Then you cap it all by mentioning the

things *definitely*, and come here as if nothing had happened! And after all you——"

A crunching of running wheels and the thud of a horse's feet made her pause and look out. Half a minute later Tamar drew up outside. In a manner, the meaning of which was understood, 'Ola said she would be disengaged in a few minutes. Then she turned again to Ramsbottom and added, more quietly, "Don't run away with the idea that Tamar is faultless in my eyes, or that I defend the past at all. To me Tamar is a friend now and has been, a real one, since father went away. And what you've done to her you've done to me in a way. Besides, there's the way you have done it; and—But it's no use talking about it now. I wish you good-bye, and I hope I shall never see you again."

With that she stepped out on to the gravel by the window and made to move away. In a moment he was at the opening, with a mouthful of expostulations. Pausing and turning half-around, she fixed a stare on him and said, "I have told you to go." This was within Tamar's hearing, to whom she now turned, by the side of the trap. Then out of the room he came, with his head up, his switch under his arm, went by on the offside, and along to the road.

When he was nearing the gate, 'Ola, with her manner now entirely changed, looked at Tamar and said, "It's all out, Tamar."

"What?"

"He's told everything about you." And down came her head; she could hold it up no longer. And Tamar led her indoors, sobbing as if she must cry her heart out. Later on, when the violence of her sorrow had ebbed, she returned quietly to the study, and when the sultry gloaming deepened into night, she was sitting in her father's chair, with her aching head lying back easefully on the top of the chair, her eyes being shut. In her heart there

was a mingled sense of pain, loneliness, mortification, disillusion, and remorse; and in her hand was Lucian's missive—just a poet-lover's letter, bearing only his initials and the lines, which he had written during his tramp from the village to Maldon:*

"God give, my Love, the music and the song to thee,
And all the pain of wrong to me.
God give to thee each white-souled hope fulfilled,
Thy life a dream or song all gaily trilled.

"Take thou the rose—let Fortune give to me the thorn.
Thus ever may it be: The morn,
Aglow with roseate flush, be thine;
The night, the long dark pitiless night be mine.

"Take thou the sweets—the wormwood and the strife be mine;
The joys of love and life be thine,—
Be thine life's sunshine and its glow;
Enough for me its winter and its snow.

"Take thou the palm—
For life shall give its guerdon unto thee;
And I will take its burden unto me,
Its burden unto me."

* The music rights of this song are the property of Miss Frances Allitsen.

VII

It was a cold, intermittently wet night; all glare, racket, hurry and mud along that thoroughfare where all the world comes and goes from one time to another—the Strand, London.

Lucian passed along by the Savoy, thinking that he might chance across some familiar American face in that Transatlantic locality. When he left Maldon in the summer, aimless and uncertain, there was a scrap of thought in his mind that he might go straight back to the States; but on the second day in the metropolis he had shelved that idea indefinitely. For a while his mind had wavered on what course to follow, and it did so still. He now had sufficient farming experience to pursue that life, if he could have found a suitable post. He also possessed his two patents, might arrive at some more if he went on to the land again, and thought of offering them to the makers of agricultural machinery. But there had been, and was still, the pull of the pen in his veins, equal to that of the brown soil and the green country-side. Yet it seemed as if his ideal life "farming for a living and literature for leisure," was a long way off. Then, remembering the state of his banking account, he had taken up his temporary abode in a humble habitation between the Strand and Holborn; where there happened to be a couple of hangers-on in journalism, whose acquaintance he had made, presently to find himself submitting certain small literary wares and being surprised at their acceptance. The result was that while he was clearing the costs of his simple needs, dallying with his future, learning new phases of

English life, and half-making up his mind now and then to run down to Mrs. Briggs and hear how matters were at the Hall Farm, the weeks slipped by and winter was upon him.

At the present moment his mind was occupied with these subjects, all in an indefinite state of decision; when, as he drew his gaze from two pretty faces in a hansom that was entering the Savoy courtyard, he was suddenly pulled up by the figure of a man who had blundered almost under the running horse's head. When the cab had gone by, leaving the man clearer to his gaze, Lucian looked straight at him, then waited for him to come across the entrance to the courtyard.

"Abe," he said, in quiet surprise, as they came shoulder to shoulder.

The other halted, turned a stubble-bearded face on him and replied, "Lu! Who on earth thought of—Come here." He crossed to a flaring shop-window, out of the way of pedestrians, Lucian at his heels, and added, "How's 'Ola?"

"Well in health when I saw her last; but I can't say she was happy, just," he answered sadly, with his mind rioting on matters more directly concerning his old friend.

"When you saw her last? When was that."

"About three months since, I guess."

"What, did things go wrong?" Their eyes met, with an understanding of what was meant.

"They did, some," said Lucian grimly. "But let's talk about you. What's happened?"

"Nothing much. But suppose you come to where I'm staying, then we can talk."

"Where's that?"

"A 'poor man's hotel' on the other side of the river."

"Far down?"

"At Newington Butts, if you know it."

"My place is nearer. Come up there."

So to Lucian's lodgings they went at once, little being said on the way there; and that little being about 'Ola when Abe disappeared and when Lucian left there, including Madoc's being sent for trial on the charge of incendiarism—to which, as a matter that was "dead and done with," Abe paid small heed. After a fire had been lit in the young man's bedroom and they were made fairly comfortable, Abe said, looking gloomily at the cracking wood, "I'm sorry—more sorry than I can say."

"At what, just?"

"That things have missed fire between you and 'Ola. —It upsets all my calculations."

"How?" asked Lucian, who was still watching Abe closely and wondering at certain obvious matters. He saw that his friend was thinner, that he had been clean shaven up to about a couple of weeks ago, yet he appeared to be as sane as any man.

"Well, when I left you all down yonder," Abe resumed presently and sighing as he spoke, his gaze still on the burning wood, "it was with the hope—the expectation I might say, for I built on it—that it would throw you and 'Ola closer together, and that it would cause you to marry by the end of the year or so."

"Then you knew quite well what you were doing when you came away?"

"Knew? Of course I did. My plans were all worked out that night we arrived home.—I'll not say that my actions didn't seem to be those of a fool; but no one but me and another knew what was driving me on."

"You puzzle me, some."

"Well, seeing how things have gone, Lu', it seems to me I may as well tell you of some affairs that I should have told you if you had married 'Ola. At the same time, —m'm, well, yes, I suppose I must have been a bit off the balance when I left there; so it seemed to me now and then when I got right away from it all. If I hadn't been,

maybe I shouldn't have done what I did. All the same, Lu', there was every good reason for what I did. However let me explain." . . . Lucian waited in silence, interest and expectation now sharpened into prominence. Then Abe told him briefly of those unpleasant happenings in Yorkshire.

"I often thought there was something at the back of Tamar being there as she was," said Lucian, breaking the pause that followed Abe's recital.

"Yes,—making straight furrows in life is natural to some men and women; but with most of us it's an acquired habit, and I soon began a crooked one when Tamar came on the scene. I'm not blaming her, mind, though she was as ready and as deep in it as I was. I led the trace-horse, you see, and should have kept the furrow straight. But from the day my wife died—horrible!" He shuddered. "And I've always been very glad that 'Ola was away from home at the time. She was staying at the Ramsbottoms', as a matter of fact.—From that day I knew I was a changed man. Then when I learnt that she had killed the child, that change was riveted."

"It was a pity that you couldn't just have kept friends with Tamar till Mrs. Shuttleworth died. She's precisely there as a farmer's wife, though I shouldn't give her top place as a woman," remarked Lucian, who hardly knew what to say.

"Yes, but it couldn't be, my lad. Woman is either too hot or too cold for friendship,—mostly too hot, whether she appears so or not. It's a golden mean that needs stability, and I had none to spare, either. You see, I didn't know Tamar in those days; or if I did she had changed terribly when she came to us down yonder." He had explained why he could not bring himself to put Tamar out of the house, and, with Lucian's knowledge of him, that explanation was enough. Abe asked for a smoke and was offered a cigarette; but that was too effem-

inate, so Lucian hunted about and found him a cigar. "You should read Milton," he said, when the cigar was alight,—"I mean on ill-assorted marriages. He knew. . . . Believe me, the best of life comes in when the man is strong and the woman weak—that was Nature's intention, at any rate; and Nature's the truest thing in this world. And, after all, truth is life—or it should be. That's what I saw in you and 'Ola—a strong man and a woman with the right sort of weakness. Of course, I don't mean that a man's to be overbearing because he's strong. What I mean is that he should take the lead properly and bear the blame if he leads the wrong way. And just the same with the woman—she shouldn't be all surrender, just because he asks her to—nothing of the sort. By weakness I mean that she should be gentle—you know, soft and persuasive."

"Subtle," suggested Lucian.

"Well, that word describes it; but I shouldn't use it. It's because of these mistakes at the altar that nine men out of ten over the age of 35 would be hermits if they studied themselves only."

"And women," said Lucian, who saw that his friend's gloominess was wearing away, and thought it was better to let him ramble on than to pull him back at once to the unhappy matters down in Essex.

"Oh, they would start at 25, or nearly all of 'em, only they're afraid of themselves. You see, a woman, generally, is so much sooner disillusioned than a man."

"Well, you're older than I am; but I guess I'll keep clean my faith in them yet a while," and Lucian smiled, as he lit another cigarette.

"In women?"

"Yes, in general—I had a mother."

"Good lad,—that would be a lesson to me if I hadn't choked the ground with so many weeds that no respectable plant will take root."

"And if I hadn't a sister, that just puts me at a disadvantage, and them at the distance that lends enchantment."

"Still optimistic, Lu'?" said Abe, in a lighter way than he had spoken so far.

"I guess so—now and then, anyhow; and when the bets are made I'll put my last dollar on woman."

"Well, well, it's only youth that can afford to have assurance; because it alone does not know."

"I don't know there's a heaven; but, by gosh, Abe, it's a fine thing to believe it. Without that faith the hard nights on the road would be too horrible to bear."

"You're on the right road, Lu',—don't worry. But look here—can you tell me why so few women laugh in comparison to the number of men."

"Can't quite say I can off-hand; but——"

"Because the average woman isn't natural enough to laugh, and by that little fact thousands of lives are ruined every year. Why, whenever my wife laughed everybody knew at once that it was only a mock, and was always followed by hysterics. And look at Tamar—if she laughed, the devil would die of envy."

"That's about precisely it, Abe. But I figure it, all the same, that the power of a good woman's laugh is just a ring from heaven." He was thinking of those curiously whole-hearted, quiet laughs of 'Ola's.

"Mind you, I admit there's more in the average woman's face than there is in the mind of the average man; but they are so afraid to let it out and be themselves, I mean be natural."

"Well, thank God for 'em in the abstract and for one of them in the concrete.—You have let the cigar go out, have a light." He laid the matches at Abe's elbow and attended to the fire.

"No, I haven't," and he blew out proof of what he said. "The worst of it is you never can convince a woman of

a mistake. Just think of Tamar—why, all the world wouldn't——"

"Ever tried gentle persuasion there?"

"Tried?—The hours I've talked quietly to her about interfering with me in the scores of things she found fault with!"

"Those little worries,—yes, I saw something——"

"Little? Yes. But, by heaven, when they're piled on from day to day! I tell you, Lu', my lad, when a woman of Tamar's sort takes to re-forming a man after her own stiff model, by superior reproof day in day out——"

"And a man of your kind," Lucian smiled.

"Whether my kind or not, when she does that something's going to break, sure as the sun shines. And there's that——" He was about to add "infanticide;" but, thinking that the subject was better left alone, he said, "No,—a man may be convinced after the fact, a woman never,—because she is always convinced before it. . . . You see a woman has either wisdom without knowledge, or knowledge and no wisdom, or neither. We western peoples can't understand woman, therefore we can't appraise her; it takes the easterners to do that—as you can see in the Old Testament—for which reason they're a thousand times happier with their women than we are with ours. It was this want of understanding and that that made Milton cry out—'Oh, why did God, that peopled highest heaven with spirits masculine, create at last this novelty on earth, this fair defect on nature?'"

"Look here, Abe, you have a sore, just, and it chafes; let's get away from it—if you don't give it a rest it will hurt you."

"No, it's this gentle rubbing that's doing it good. You see, Lu',—and this may be a bit of a fingerpost to you some day, if you bear it in mind—I was like a good many more, and like the writers of the most books I read last winter, after the kickups about the Institute, I didn't go to life

for what there was in it, but for what I could squeeze out of it by unfair means and think was the right thing. I saw it then, while I was reading those books—it was the parallel that woke me up; instead of making my scheme fit in with Nature's, as everything must do if it's true at the bottom, and going to last, I tried to make Nature's scheme fit mine. That was silly; but I hadn't learnt enough then. I've found out since that if you only harmonise yourself with your surroundings there's a deal of happiness in it—it's a sovereign to a brass farthing that you won't be happy if you don't. And if you're surrounded by Nature get into touch with it—there's much balm of Gilead there."

"Isn't it just a bit out to say Nature when you mean something else?" Lucian asked quietly, and smiled slightly in a suggestive way.

"M-m, well, yes—I see what you mean: That we don't play up to Nature at all by the way we live?"

"Just so, according to you." His meaning was that Abe was not being true to himself in his argument.

"Nor we don't either. You can say what you like to the contrary, man is a polygamist at heart—I mean the average healthy man; and Nature does her best to prove it. Doesn't she give you more than two women to every man? And do you think she meant the surplus to be thrown aside, useless? Hasn't she equalised things in the lower orders of creation by natural selection, by the wandering freedom of choice from time to time? Go amongst birds or animals or insects at mating time and see if you can find a female pining alone. Monogamy is, of course, a beautiful thing, a sublime idea,—in self-denial and debasement and that sort of thing it's sometimes the very next door to heaven itself. Why, if a woman only understood and had a proper sense of justice, instead of thinking—as so many of them do in early life—that man is a stalwart incarnation of all the virtues, or—as

most of them do later on—that he's an unmitigated devil for whom there's no redemption,—why, instead of doing that she would see that in order to play up to this fanciful idea of monogamy he's scores and scores of times a self-denying hero when she thinks he's just a lump of—well, something,—not masculine flesh and blood."

"But don't you think, some, that it's best for him not to have too much licence in anything?" queried Lucian, who had learned to know Abe better than to judge him by these kinks in his composition. "Man has to be kept down a little, I figure it—to suffer one way or another; to be in a kind of bondage, moral or spiritual. It's necessary for the development of the better part of him, I take it—it brings him nearer to the inner heart of things and realities and that.—Don't you think?"

"Well, in a way, yes; but I don't think this monogamy-business was a part of the original lease that we have on life.—It isn't natural, and what isn't natural is false, and what's false isn't good for man or woman finally.—You'll find the grain bad when it comes to the threshing. You can depend on it, Lu', that man or nation that goes against the laws of nature will have a big price to pay in the long run. Why, plenty of women know this well enough,—they know that when a man goes off with another woman it isn't always because he's sick of the old one, or loves the new one better than he ever did the old one; it's because nature's forcing him back to be true to stock. And some women know it, and good ones at that,—and it's my opinion they wouldn't have it otherwise. Doesn't it increase the sport of life for them, and keep things humming a bit when they would be otherwise dull and stale?—this having to watch the hound lest it starts some other person's hare and runs it down."

"Well, it may be all true enough; but I guess I'll keep my toes the other way as long as I can," was the comment of Lucian, who was wondering how to work the conversa-

tion back to Abe's movements; for whilst the latter had talked, he had decided to endeavour to get him back to the Hall Farm, if only for 'Ola's sake.

"Quite right, Lu'. If I had thought there was any likelihood of my seeds taking root in your soil I should have kept them to myself,—every man to his own kind, as the devil said when he tried to make a black man. Talking of the devil—is Pinch Jellie down yonder yet?"

"Yes, he was right there when I came away; but it seemed to me that he was losing ground pretty generally——"

"M'm, thought as much.—Most hens that lay away come home to roost. Then they always said that I could never read character," and, with a gesture of satisfaction, he threw the stump of his cigar into the fire. "How was it taken generally when I came away?"

Lucian explained, then added, "Amongst our three selves we were just afraid that some evil had happened to you; not that much was said though, either by 'Ola or Tamar. But it puzzled us that the police could find nothing of you."

"Oh, so you put the police on, did you?" And he let out something in the nature of those old time laughs of his.

"Yes." Lucian was now determined to keep the talk on these lines. "For 'Ola's sake I guess it was the thing to do."

"Quite so; but when that lawyer came to you I was two days out on the Atlantic, on my way to America."

"Gee, so you have been to the States?"

"I have; but it isn't the country for me. I've been a good deal of a fool, Lu', it's true; but, with all respect to you, I wasn't fool enough to stop in a country like that when my stake wasn't there."

"What's wrong with it, just?" Lucian asked, smilingly.

"Wrong? What's right, except the mass of the people—politics rotten to the core; commerce in the grip of millionaires that ought to be shot; your Beef Trust throttling agriculture to death; costs of living so high that a man who would be comfortably off here lives hand-to-mouth there. What's wrong with it? No, my lad, they can have the States that want them. I prefer the states of a little comfort, honesty and a little security. Now Canada——"

"You went up there?"

"Yes, and I should have stayed; but I couldn't settle down till I knew if my plan had carried all right. So I came back a week ago, with the intention of finding out how things had gone. In fact, I wrote to that lawyer yesterday to get what news he could privately and send it on,—it was the only way I could see finally."

"I guess I would like to hear the story straight on, Abe.—Do you mind?"

"Not a bit.—I was going to tell it to you now. When we drove home that evening I realised there would never be any peace for me where Tamar was. I was wild at what had happened—neither 'Ola nor you knew a hundredth part of the petty ways in which that woman had made my life a misery. Well, I couldn't get rid of her; I'd sworn never to turn her out of doors. If it was God's punishment to me that she should be there, as it seemed to be—well, there she should be. But when it came to the fire, and she had driven the insurance out of my head, and remembering all the other things, I could stand it no longer. So I said to myself,—as she won't go I must. Then I put this and that together in this way: Give the whole bag of tricks to 'Ola, except £100 to start afresh with, and disappear so that you'll never be found; this will draw her and Lu' together; they will get married and be comfortable—I never thought she would see anything serious in Ben Ramsbottom; I gave her credit for more sense than

that; and reckoned that my sudden loss would do the thing completely—then Tamar would have to find a home elsewhere. Then, some time in the future, when things were properly settled down again, I would come back and have a look at you, whether I stayed or not. Of course, I saw that it meant a lot of pain to 'Ola, but I could see no other way out of the infernal mess, and another year of Tamar's devilish persistency would drive me mad. All the way from home to Maldon that morning I couldn't make up my mind whether to send her or you a letter about what I was doing; because if I sent her one it would upset my plan to draw you two together by a mutual sorrow; and if I sent one to you it was a thousand to one that you would tell her.—Oh, I know you would. I've been a lover, and I don't forget it, quite. You wouldn't have seen her suffering and said nothing when you had the secret in your hands.—No, and that was why I went as I did—under a new name from Liverpool and with a clean face. I shaved in the train, coming up from Chelmsford, —the first time for twelve years, and I shan't forget it soon. But now—well, I hardly know what to do or say. One thing going wrong has put everything out of gear."

"I'll tell you what to do, some, and I figure it as the only thing to do."

"What's that, Lu'?"

"Go back right away, and either send Tamar about her business or make up your mind to keep her in her place," said Lucian, in quiet decision."

"My lad, you don't know Tamar Pringle. And I shall never send her about her business, as you call it, although she has enough to live on," Abe replied just as decidedly.

"Well, what she had I don't know; but I know she lipped her hand into her own pocket, by-the-bye, for the rebuilding and that, and I gathered that she put in all she could."

"M'm, I'm not surprised at that, and it's another rea-

son why she'll stay as long as she wants to—unless 'Ola marries. But tell me how the damage was repaired."

Lucian did so, concluding with, "Well, what do you say about going down there to-morrow?" He wanted 'Ola's grief to be brought to an end forthwith and to know how matters were with her generally.

Abe watched the fire a little while, then said, "No;" after which there was another pause. This was spent by Lucian in preparing to resume the argument; but as he was about to speak, Abe looked steadily at him and said, "I won't go to-morrow; but I'll go on the following day if you'll come with me."

"That's a knockout, just," was Lucian's quiet comment.

"If you don't come, I don't go."

"And that's worse, and it isn't precisely fair, either."

"Say what you like about the conditions, Lu',—it's there and I shall not alter it," Abe replied emphatically.

"Well," Lucian answered slowly, "I want to go and I don't, as you know, some. But you have to go, or fetch 'Ola up here and make things straight again, for her——"

"No, I'll not fetch her up here. If I do the thing, I'll do it—go there."

"Then it's a bargain—we go together; but I want this condition,—that you agree to let me come away quietly at the end of two months, if I wish to."

Abe saw the reason and justice of this and consented. Then it was arranged that Lucian should write at once a careful letter to 'Ola, telling her that he had met her father, saying that the latter had been to America on business, asking her to send a trap to meet a given train and imparting such information and cautionary advice as he thought needful. They then fell to discussing a line of action down there to the cause of Abe's absence, Tamar, and other obvious matters.

THE LAST ACRE

NATURALLY it was 'Ola who took the old dogcart to meet her father and Lucian at Maldon; for Tamar had never been one to push herself into notice on occasions of that kind, nor at any time for herself. The two men had arranged matters so that 'Ola should have no length of time to spend in excited waiting, only a couple of hours between the receipt of Lucian's letter and harnessing out for her gladsome journey. The night had left a deep rime frost behind. In from the sea, the mudflats and the "saltings" a bitter east wind swept over the heavy, low-lying land, now mostly in serrated furrows, green beneath the white, or in green fallow. With cheeks reddened by her drive, her fine nostrils quivering like those of a thoroughbred when chafing at the halt, and her splendid eyes glowing with the excitement of the moment, 'Ola threw herself into her father's arms on the platform.

Then came the homely, trivial, human in, "Why, you've shaved your beard off, dad!"

"Yes.—Don't you think it makes me look smarter?"

"Oh, lots! But I hardly think anyone will know you!"

"So much the better perhaps,—eh?"

In a curious fashion his remark seemed to swing their minds straight from that moment to the past and the immediate future; and, now with a curb on her bearing, she turned to Lucian. The next minute she was on the other side of her father, and the three were walking abreast along the quiet platform, as fine a looking trio as ever stepped out side-by-side. Truth to tell each heart was happy just then. Short though her greeting had been

to Lucian, there was in the grip of her hand, the sly glance into his eyes and the sudden flash, a something that ran through him like an omen of good tidings. On his part Abe had momentarily forgotten the past and was heedless of the future; while 'Ola was radiant again, in a long fur jacket and a closely fitting hat of the same kind.

Abe took the reins, a matter of habit, and drove to the lawyer's office to put matters right there. Then out along the road they bowled, as half a dozen wild fowl went screeching inland from the marches, indicating that bad weather was coming; and both Lucian and Abe felt and said what a pleasure it was to be back again betweeen hedgerows in place of confining streets. It was glorious once more to breathe the pure air, see the clear sky, and take a look from field to meadow till wood or river stopped their further view. On their way down in the train the two men had arranged that nothing of the past should be said during at least the first six hours after their arrival. Hence, to all outward appearances, as they drove along the high road, with its remarkable pairs of sharp turns, it seemed as if Abe and Lucian had been away on no more than a business or a holiday tour. Naturally, however, there was a certain balancing pendulum of sadness at the back of each one's mind. As to their talk: this, after Abe's belated query concerning Tamar, was mainly on farming matters and mutual acquaintances. Some items of interest that 'Ola had to tell were: Madoc's being convicted and sentenced, since which it had leaked out that he was to have been married to a niece of Mrs. Hincksons-Tiffling's, an overdressed creature, said to be the lately discovered and the only relative whom the big woman was known to have. (At the tail of this her father almost asked if Ben Ramsbottom was still about the place; but he checked the impulse.) Madoc's uncle was at death's door with rheumatic fever, owing to his falling into a ditch when going home drunk one night. The labour colony,

did not seem to be making much headway, and to all appearances the villagers were in for a winter of hardships. Mrs. Briggs had gained another first prize for a pig. Mrs. Chapman had been taken away to London, to be operated on (for some internal trouble), and the case was thought to be very serious. Mercy, she was sorry to say, was going to leave them to be married to Mr. Dunstan; and Miss Scopes had been dead six weeks, and had left her ('Ola) her dinner-set of old crown-Derby and some pieces of antique lace. But 'Ola said nothing of the way in which Mrs. Hinckson-Tiffling had gone about (as Mrs. Briggs had told her and Tamar) saying that Miss Scopes had always promised the lace and the dinner-set to her; nor that the loveable little old maid had been buried according to her desire, in the wonderful night-gown; neither did she mention that Tamar's past was then known in the place, because this was a matter that would be best told quietly indoors.

On their way through the village the few persons who noticed them seemed to be too much surprised to speak; Moyle, who was shoeing a wheel outside his shop, being the only one to give them a sort of quiet welcome with his hand. As they neared the house, Abe's whole attentions were fixed on the new outbuildings. He pulled up in silence, still looking at the disposition of things. Lucian leapt to the ground and helped 'Ola down, as her father descended on the offside.

Looking at him, she said, "Do you mind taking the mare to the stables? We are short-handed at present.—Simmons has left." She would not say that she had discharged Simmons for being rude to Tamar and refusing to apologise.

Glad to do anything that she asked of him, Lucian took out the light luggage they had brought—the heavy was to follow by Nobbs's cart—and led the mare away. Meanwhile 'Ola went indoors with her father, so as to

lessen the inevitable constraint at the meeting between him and Tamar; who had agreed with 'Ola that morning to say nothing for some hours about the past being known locally, and to leave it to 'Ola to break to him. Just as Lucian was putting a rug on the mare's back, after giving her half a "skep" of corn and a rub-down, and wondering if he would have the pain and chagrin of seeing Ben walk in that evening (for Abe had decided that Lucian was to sleep in the house so long as he remained there, by which arrangement Abe would always have his company as a relief from Tamar's) and was about to go outside when he heard a light step, and 'Ola entered, divested of her jacket and wraps, but still wearing that becoming hat.

"Have you finished?—Already?" she asked, with a burst of brightness.

"Yes," said he, now noticing that her curves were less full than they were when he had last seen them. "I was just coming in."

"Oh, I thought you would be a little while yet." A sudden change seemed to pass over her.

"Why?" he queried, hardly knowing what else to say and marking that abrupt subduing in her manner.

"Oh, I—you have come back again," she added quickly, checking the embarrassment that accompanied the first two words and looking at the mare's hind fetlocks.

"That's so," he replied, striving to keep himself well-in-hand. He was about to say that he had come for a while and why, when she asked, looking at him, her head bent,

"Shall you stay?"

"I shall if you wish me to, 'Ola," he answered instantly, yet quietly.

"I—yes, Lucian, I want you to stay," was the low rejoinder, as her hands were involuntarily raised a little towards him.

It was out. During her drive to Maldon she had made up her mind that he should not go away again, as he had gone before. Now, determined to lose no time in making amends for the past, she had hurried out to him, never dreaming, in her suppressed excitement, that her burden would be unloaded in so short and simple a manner. Thus their glances met; her eyes being a little moist. Her hands were in his; and that stable was hallowed by the first kiss of a love that had matured in adversity, as all things must that are to withstand the wear and tear of life. . . .

"Come," said she, "we must go in.—Father will wonder where we are. Besides," and her tone changed, as her expressive eyes suddenly lost some of their glow, "there's bad news to tell both him and you."

"About what, just?"

"About Tamar and—and father.—An awful scandal that has got about here."

"Of those bygone affairs?"

"Yes.—What do you know? . . ."

"Your father has told me. Who let it out?—Ramsbottom, I guess." This news and what Abe had told him were enough for him to hit on the right channel at once. By her sudden flush of shame he knew that his guess was right. "Well, it's out now; and it can't be helped. Let's go in to them."

So together they went indoors, deeply and quietly happy, yet with the leavening thought of possible unpleasantness there. They found Abe and Tamar in the study—where 'Ola had spent her two hours of waiting that morning, in tidying-up, fire-lighting, etc.—and were just in time to act as a stop-gap. Thinking that the wisest course was to explain his absence at once, Abe had briefly, and without any show of prejudice (for his six months of freedom from "pesterings" and other worries had steadied him up into good condition again), said why

he went away as he did. He added, however, his hope that this action would have brought 'Ola and Lucian together. With a few opening words in steely refutation of the charge—which would have been followed up there and then, but that something seemed to say it would be unwise at the moment—Tamar, who had met him in the hall as if he had been to market, was on the point of saying that so far as Ben and 'Ola were concerned he had wasted his time and filled the place with scandal, because everybody had said that he had either committed suicide or had been taken to an asylum. But, fortunately, Lucian and 'Ola entered at that moment; and the latter, seeing by Tamar's face, especially by the rising of that fullness on each side of her mouth, that matters were not going smoothly, signalled surreptitiously to her to leave the room. Tamar did so, on an excuse about dinner. Then 'Ola turned to Lucian and got rid of him, with a whisper that "*she* would mention it to father." The understanding between her and Tamar had been that nothing untoward of any sort should be said till all were comfortably settled down in the evening. But, "as one impulse leads to another," 'Ola had immediately resolved, on seeing the strain between her father and Tamar, to tell him everything at once; her quick impression being that when he knew all that Tamar had done, he must feel more kindly disposed towards her. So to Abe she went, put herself on his knee, his unusual height allowing her to rest her head on his shoulder, and said,

"Dad, I've done as you would like me to."

"What's that, 'Ola?" he asked again feeling that she was worth coming home for, whatever the later worries might be.

"Made friends with Lucian," was the low answer.

"What, already!"

"Yes. You always say never let a good impulse lie till it gets cold."

"Ah, my girl, but this is not a thing for impulse. And where's Ben in it all?"

"Don't be afraid, Dad—I've wanted Lucian to come back nearly ever since he went. And Ben—he has gone home, I think. He hasn't been here for over two months, and he won't come again."

"Oh,—was it so bad as that?"

"Yes; but not about me—It's bad news, dad—and I'm so sorry! You're hardly in the house again when——" And, with both arms around his neck, she was at the point of tears.

"Why, what is it, my lass?—I can't see anything to worry about.—You haven't lent or lost any money!"

"No, it isn't that. Ben told everything about Tamar and made it appear worse than it is."

"Oh, the dev—! Well, I don't see that's so bad," he added more slowly. "Perhaps it will show her at last that this is no place for her."

"But don't you see, it would be all the same now whether she went away or not; the disgrace would still be here, be with us if . . ."

"If what?"

"If you don't marry her. . . ." He was letting his head rest against the top of the chair back, his gaze aslant on the ceiling, one arm around 'Ola's shoulders, his mind in an unenviable state, and she looking up from under her eyebrows, with a close study of his face. She was not aware that his attitude towards Tamar had grown to be something in the nature of hate. He had never been in the habit of telling her his troubles, and particularly not in cases like this, where he considered himself to be a guilty victim; nor had it ever been his custom to *complain* to any person of how another treated him. All that 'Ola saw at the moment was that her father was still too surprised to speak. Here, then, was her opportunity—pour in her cruise of oil, little as there was of it, before the

waters became too turbulent for it to have effect. "And she has been so good to me since you went away—spent her money and sold half her annuity to repair the damage of the fire, so as to keep the working-account for me at the bank." Much more to the same effect was quietly said, much that had already been told to him by Lucian, but now in a very different way—with the power of appealing affection behind it all. During those months of trial, sad and longing hearts and few words—far the sadder and more longing on 'Ola's side—the two women had been drawn together as they had never been before. Not that 'Ola was blind to what she knew of Tamar's part in her father's unhappiness, or that she had entirely forgiven it even in her most lenient moods. But her own sorrow and Tamar's still more reticent sadness, added to the latter's unhesitating service and sympathy after her father's disappearance, her ignorance of Abe's real feeling for Tamar, and now her joy to have him back alive and in good health, had turned her into an effective advocate on Tamar's behalf. She had not witnessed the agonising death of her mother, and Abe had taken care to keep the worst of that scene from her. The link that comes of sex, an understanding that can come of nothing else, and is sympathetic or not according to the individual, gave her a different view of the infanticide from what her father had. Besides, whilst being far from pardoning Tamar altogether in this matter, she had read the trial and believed in the plea of a partially unhinged mind; while Abe had refused to read the one, or to take heed of "any excuse that a lenient jury found for a good-looking, educated woman in trouble." Ever since he heard of the infanticide his way of thinking had been: in the birth of the child lay the whole disgrace and everything in connection with it—why, then, commit a crime and make the scandal public, to wipe out that which it could not remove, and only made worse? In his masculine way, he could

understand a person becoming mad or doing a mad thing under the press of worry lest a damning secret should come out; but for the life of him he could not see why such things should be after the act had taken place, especially when such a line of action worsened what had occurred. Thus their opinions of this matter differed considerably; and knowing only her own view to any useful extent, bearing in mind that her father had wronged Tamar and what the scandal meant to her and to them locally unless it were buried in a marriage between them, feeling that Tamar had now justified her forced presence in the house, thinking that there was no real obstacle to their union except that death-bed vow—which she had never considered to be quite a right thing—and that peace might be so easily kept between them, she, arguing almost entirely from the scandal, pleaded Tamar's case as if she had been primed with every point in the whole affair; for that was what it amounted to—pleading, not argument. Till at last Abe, with no anger in him, nor any rebellion against this unexpected state of affairs, only a sort of biting resignation, looked down at her and asked:

"Has Tamar put you up to this at all?"

"No, not a word, father. She doesn't know that I was going to mention it—only tell you of the scandal." The truth was that, although she had intended to point out to him that she thought his duty was towards both her and Tamar, now that the truth was known locally, she had risen to the subject and drawn it out by the sheer fact of having opened it, by her growing interest in it and by the quiet, silent manner in which he had allowed her to pursue the matter; he, meantime noting all the points, admitting the truth of them as they were seen by 'Ola and by all who did not know what he knew and felt, and weighing up the situation from his own point of view. For one minute he thought of arguing the subject from that point; then his natural habit asserted itself—under

the idea that he would seem to be raising new excuses for refusing to comply with what, on the face of things, appeared to be his bounded duty, and would appear to be trying to shirk his own blame by bringing charges which he had never mentioned before. Finally he lifted her from him, and stood up with the same action, quoting:

"Lord, thou hast turned my ways upside down."

"But, dad, you will agree—won't you?—you can see there's nothing else to do. And I can't think of her being turned away now, after everything!—and that's the only thing else." And, as he stood with his back to the fire, she went up to him and put her arms around his neck.

"She has done *so* much for me, dad; and there isn't a bit of pride in her at what she's done."

"No, I dare say not.—There was never enough humanity in Tamar for her to be proud of anything, either for herself or anybody else——"

"Don't say that, dad! She's a brick——"

"As for what you ask—well, I don't know, 'Ola—I'll take till morning to think it over. For this day and night, at any rate, let's have peace all round." Then he said how glad he was that she and Lucian had "made it up so nicely and so quickly," and patted and kissed her cheek.

So peace it was; for 'Ola went at once and told Tamar enough of what she had done to ensure quietude in that direction, and even ventured so far as to say a few words on the wisdom of "leaving him alone in little things." Abe spent the short afternoon in an examination of the new out-buildings, pointing out here and there where an improvement could have been put in, but offering unstinted praise on the whole. He would go into the questions of land, cattle and horse-breeding, and other such matters on the morrow. Then evening came and with it Jinglejoy to welcome his master back, his old eyes twinkling as they had been wont to, the dexter one appearing

as if it would look at Abe's back while the other examined his front, thus to make sure all round. That evening went in quiet enjoyment—a few games at whist, a few songs and a few stolen pieces of conversation by the lovers. Between supper and midnight Abe spent the time in his study. When morning came, after breakfast, on seeing 'Ola's eyes fixed on him, he said to her quietly, "Yes, I agree." Then he went straight to Tamar and put it to her that, as the past was known by the people around them, it appeared as if they ought to get married at once and as quietly as possible; at any rate, 'Ola's position, as well as their own respectability in the place, demanded that—unless.—But he kept to himself the suggestion that the only alternative was for her to leave them. He did not wish to start his return home with a bitter argument in which he would be worsted; nor could he forget her service to 'Ola during his absence. Placidly and with very few words, she thought the same. Thus the compact was made, formal on the surface, and in a manner feelingless beneath it on his side. Abe went his way, with the resolution that although in the letter he was breaking his vow to the dead wife, for conventionality's sake, in the spirit he would keep it; for there should be no cohabitation between him and Tamar. Whether further bickerings should come of it all or not, he cared not. This much would he surrender and no more, and stand the racket of whatever came afterwards. Then, to comply with the law and heedless of the gossip it would arouse, he sent Lucian up to the Rectory—where he would not go—to enter the banns of marriage between him and Tamar. Then he told Tamar, that, as he was determined not to let the Rector marry them, she must go and live at Southminster for the necessary length of time so that the wedding could take place there. And there Tamar went that evening, Lucian and 'Ola driving her over.

Later on that night, when 'Ola had retired and he

and Lucian sat in the study, he broke the silence of a long interval by saying:

"I wonder which is best—to die in the midst of friends and be regretted on all hands, almost; or to outlive them all and go unregarded to the grave?" Lucian looked up from his book, in surprise; and was about to speak, when Abe resumed: "But, when all's said and done, it's a matter of personal sentiment or circumstances, or of both. In any case, you can depend on it that the man who lives very long must be prepared to accumulate a lot of memories and to shed associations. And if he has any heart in him he will gather regrets, as soft silk gathers burrs—or he'll be something short or over as a man."

"What's the matter, just?—been reading a funeral oration?" Lucian added, smiling, yet still surprised.

"No. I was thinking at the outset, of a queer dream I had two nights before I met you in London."

"Oh."

"Yes. I was carying a coffin on my shoulder and I wanted to read the breastplate; but as often as I turned my head to get a look at it, the thing seemed to kick up and go half down my back."

"Is that all?—had a big supper, I guess, that night." And he laughed quietly; for with his good fortune in the stables on the previous day his optimism had returned in full force. On the other hand he saw the inadvisability of encouraging a man of Abe's kind to dwell on such a matter.

"No, I hadn't."

"Well, I should just keep it from 'Ola, anyhow."

"You needn't be afraid that I shall tell her, my lad." There the subject dropped. But Abe remained quiet and preoccupied; and, watching him furtively from time to time, Lucian saw that either he was cogitating on his queer dream or on something else that made him very thoughtful.

From the following morning Abe set himself wholeheartedly to the task of bringing back his holding, his grazing, breeding, and cheese-making to the larger condition in which he had left it all. One of the first things he did was to buy a couple of hunting mares. He did not see why, he said, he should breed hackneys and cart-horses for hackney and cart-horse prizes, when he could do so much better with hunters and break them himself into the bargain. To himself he had also said that as he was going against one vow, in a way, he did not see why he should not do the same with the other, which was more a resolution to disarm temptation than anything else, and enjoy the old exhilaration now and then. But he would not join the local hunt; for had he not said that "fox-hunting was a barbarous child's way of playing at 'sport.'" All he wanted was a scamper now and then over the country. The other mare he offered to Lucian; but the latter declined, although 'Ola said that her only care as to whether he hunted or not was his safety. To his larger American notions of sport fox-hunting did not appeal. As to Abe, he seemed to be quite regardless of what anyone said about him. To those who spoke to him, whether as a welcome back or in an ordinary way, he talked as if nothing out of the common had ever happened. But he kept himself entirely to his own affairs, and generally behaved in the manner of a particularly level-headed man. Thus, with Tamar away and no unusual cause for upsets, affairs at the Hall Farm were moving as if on well oiled wheels to what they had done in times gone by. Then, in the second week after the return of Abe and Lucian, the former had the satisfaction—of which he spoke to no one—of seeing the last of Pinch Jellie. The small dandy, finding that his "snug little fortune" would not secure him the social position which he had expected from it, and that he could not live down the Institute "mistake," handed his local property over

to an agent at Maldon, packed up his fine clothes, his Jacobean goblet, and took them, his malacca cane, himself and his clock-cleaning back to Chelmsford. He had, he said, "had enough and a bit to spare of rural life."

At the beginning of the following week, about ten days after Tamar went to lodge at Maldon, she did that which greatly surprised Abe, 'Ola and Lucian and left a mixture of pleasure and sadness in all their hearts. Quite unexpectedly she drove up to the door, in a hired trap, just after breakfast. Having been met on the doorstep by 'Ola, she asked for Abe, then saw him crossing from the stables and added that she wanted to see him privately. At that 'Ola attracted his attention; then, while he walked towards them, she fixed her eyes and thoughts on Tamar's face and manner, in both of which she now saw something unusual. When the morning greetings were over between Abe and Tamar, she asked if he could spare her ten minutes or so.

"Ten?—Yes, twenty, this morning, if you like. Come in," and he led the way to the breakfast-room, where there was a fire, adding that she would be cold after her early drive and wondering what matter of importance could have brought her from Maldon at that time of the day. 'Ola whispered, as they followed him indoors,

"I hope nothing's gone wrong."

"No—nothing out of the way," Tamar replied similarly.

When the door was shut, and 'Ola had gone to keep Mercy from interrupting them, Tamar looked across at Abe and said, in that even way and tone of hers,

"Abe, I want you to tell me why you went away as you did." Surprise kept him silent. After waiting half a minute or so she added, "I don't want to rake up old things unnecessarily, nor you to go into a lot of detail; but I should be glad to know exactly why you went away."

"This is unexpected, Tamar," he replied.

"Possibly."

"It is that; but what's the drift."

"That depends on your answer, Abe."

"Then you must have the answer?"

"Well, yes—I think so."

"And suppose it's an unpleasant one."

"That doesn't matter.—In fact, what you say makes me ask all the more why you went."

"Well, I didn't, and I don't want to raise any fresh trouble, Tamar; but——"

"It won't do that in any case——"

"Well, if you must know, it was mainly because of you —those bickerings and——" He paused, undesirous of "piling the matter up" and cognisant of a sudden change in her expression.

"I see—I thought so," said she, at length, conviction ringing in her placid voice.

Abe began, "Of course, I know that wasn't everything in the matter, and that——"

"It doesn't make any difference. Perhaps my eyes have been opened a little since you went away; at any rate, they have since you came back."

"Oh! And . . ."

"Well, I've come to say, now that I know the truth, there won't be any wedding for you and me." Abe half jumped from his seat, then sat bolt upright, wondering if his hearing had played him a prank, or if that was Tamar sitting there and in her senses. On the last point she at once set him right by adding, "No, Abe—we have done enough foolish things, one way and another.—And what made you ask me to marry you?—first put it into your head, I mean, when you came home?"

"'Ola.—She showed me what I ought to do. You've stood by her like a brick and——"

"I see," was the quiet interruption. "Yes, it's all plain enough; but it would not do.—I see that now. You

are yourself, Abe; I am myself; and it is too late for either of us to change."

"Then you really think that . . .?"

"Yes, I do.—I know what you mean. It has troubled me for some days; so I decided last night to come over this morning and settle it," she replied, showing no jot of resentment at that sudden brightness which had accompanied his unfinished question.

Abe was fast for words; he wanted to jump up and rattle out his thanks; yet he saw the unkindness of such an action; and while he thought of how splendidly she was behaving in the matter and desired to praise her for it, he also recognised that the whole thing was being done "with a frigid lack of humanity—" as he phrased it in his mind. In a moment it was plain to him that Tamar had seen the "duty" side of the subject, and would hold to it as persistently as she had previously held to her view of his duty to her. But here, again, he was only partially right. Behind Tamar's decision, hidden by that placid reserve of hers, there was much of what he termed "humanity"—the steady, undemonstrative humanity that had served 'Ola in such good stead. Suffering, serving and seeing sorrow, had done her a large amount of good, but it was not in her to show this fact as others would have done. To her he was and would always be what she had found him when she ran him to earth in Essex here—the father, faulty, but still the father, of her child and all that lay hidden sexually in that fact and may not be written. She saw the reasons, immovable till death, of their ever being able to live happily together, and that she alone now held the key of the outletting door. To her it was a tragedy such as it could not be to him now; but it was not in her to make the least show of this fact. On the contrary it was hers quietly to state her duty, and in the same manner say good-bye to the three of them, then similarly go away—to find some place where

she could maintain her equanimity, and keep hidden from all the world that complicated wound which no time would heal completely. And this was what she did, then and there—taking with her the half unspoken, yet quite understood blessing of all the three, a remembrance of 'Ola's tears, and leaving with the latter a promise to write when she "became settled."

What matters were like to Abe, 'Ola and Lucian when Tamar had gone can be easily imagined; on this point there is no need to say more than that quite twenty-four hours had gone over their heads ere the father and daughter went about their daily routine as usual. Then the days and weeks passed away as they had done before Tamar appeared on the scene, except that Abe kept entirely to his work and his home. Of this indefinite postponement of the marriage, as it seemed to be to the villagers and others, much was said, as a matter of course; but there being nothing to feed the gossip, it died of inanition. So Christmas again went by, marked only at the Hall Farm by the wedding of Mercy and Dunstan; and still 'Ola had heard nothing of Tamar. Then Abe began to fidget and chafe against the isolation in which they lived. Of this he said but little to either Lucian or 'Ola, yet it was patent to them. He knew that it was in him to be doing something more in the world than what he was doing, something for his fellowmen; and the hunger grew to be moving in that way; but he could not, would not, do so here—not after what had been. He saw that much of his work had been done on good ground in a few places, that it was having some of the desired effect, but far too slowly to please him. While seeing the pity of it all he recognised that the lethargic temperament of the East Anglian was but like the starved soil of Essex, the one as unresponsive as the other was unremunerative. His labour had not all been in vain, and that was his only comfort; for it was too self evident that

whilst he saw and revelled in the sweet philosophy of the country-side and the changing seasons, the majority of those around him saw only a hard living and all its discomforts.

So that when he, early in the new year, suggested that 'Ola and Lucian should be married, and that they should sell out and all go to Canada, the other two readily agreed with him. Heartily sick of the place, in which he had seen so many reverses of one sort or another, still feeling a certain amount of the shame of defeat, and knowing that he would never again be there what he had been, he was eager to leave it all behind and make a fresh start in a new land. So it was that, at the end of the following April, he, Lucian and 'Ola (who had been married by the Rector's *locum tenens*) took Jinglejoy with them—to keep him and his silvery tongue out of the workhouse—and set off for the land of big farms and a big future. Nor, after all, was it a sad or dull quartette that turned its back for a last time on Essex. And there is no reason to say why and how each one felt a certain and decided pleasure; enough it was there. But this much may be said of the young husband and wife—" out there, with all the rolling spread of Nature and God's clear skies to give him growth of soul and outlook, he would follow farming for a living, and literature for leisure in the long winter evenings; and 'Ola would be his critic, his guide and his inspiration."

THE END

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